the weekly
Standard
MARCH 8, 2004
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ASSIONATE INTENSITY AT THE MOVIES
Matt Labash

The Democrats' New Burden

Campaign finance reform backfires

by David Tell

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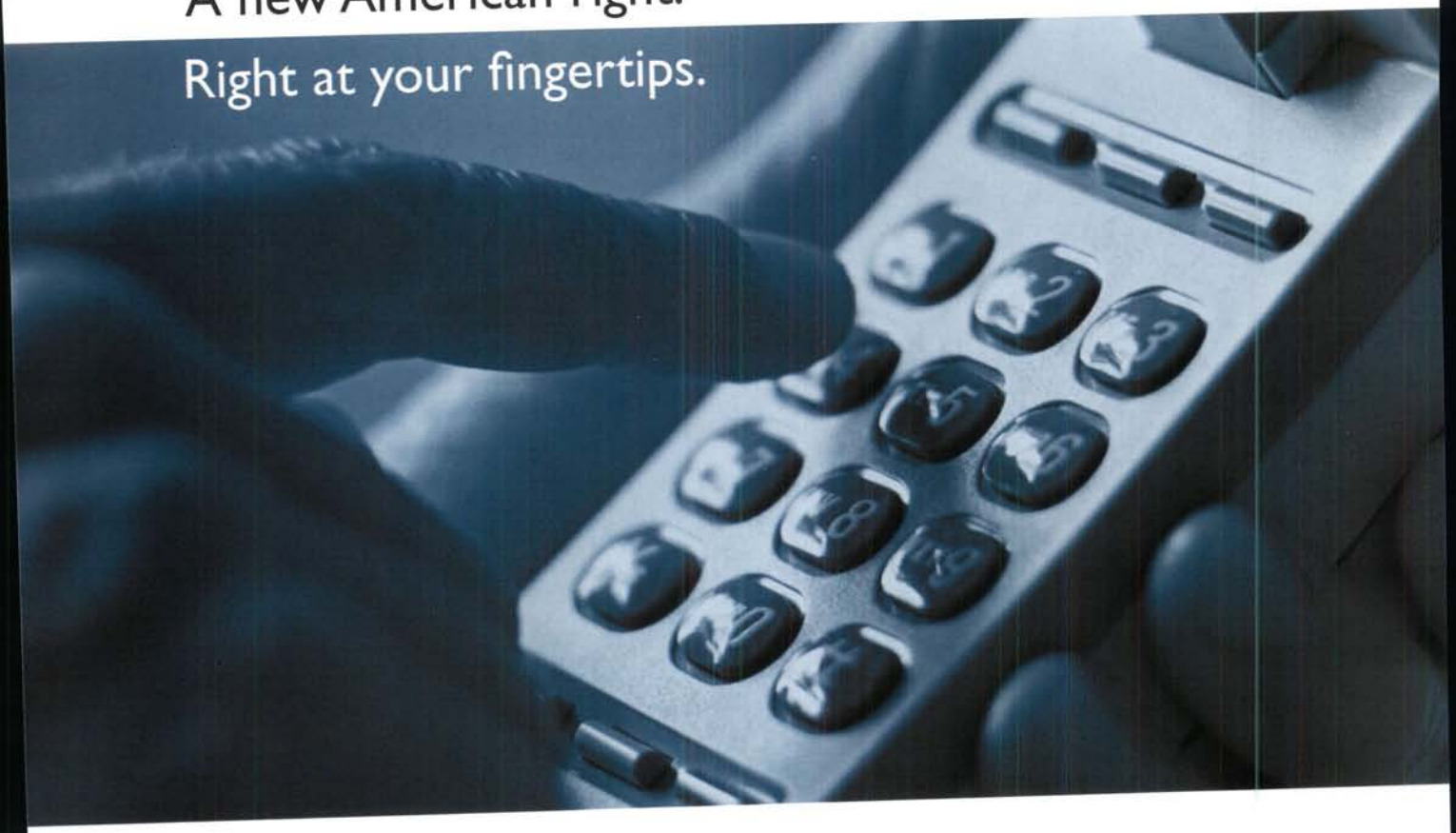

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the weekly Standard

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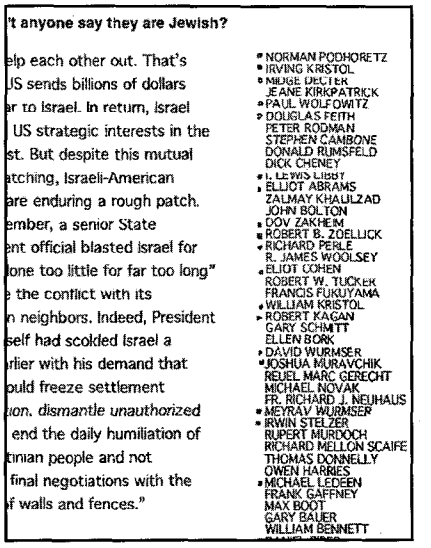
The Anti-Semitism of the Intellectuals

"It used to be said that anti-Catholicism was the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals," columnist George Will observes. "Today, anti-Semitism is the anti-Semitism of the intellectuals."

Exhibit A this week is the editorial in the latest issue of the Vancouver-based corporate-bashing lefty journal *Adbusters*, which asks plaintively, "Why won't anyone say they are Jewish?" *They* are the "neocons." The editor of the journal, Kalle Lasn, has helpfully compiled a list of 50 "influential neocons," and he's annotated the list by scribbling little black dots in the margin next to the names of the 25 he thinks are Jews. Charming.

He thereby inadvertently confirms the perspicacious joke definition of our former colleague David Brooks, who recently explained that "con is short for 'conservative' and neo is short for 'Jewish.'" Lasn, alas, does not have a sense of humor. He seems to think he is being brave.


't anyone say they are Jewish?

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NORMAN PODHORETZ
IRVING KRISTOL
MIKE DECTER
JEANE KIRKPATRICK
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DOUGLAS FEITH
PETER RODMAN
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THOMAS DONNELLY
OWEN HARRIES
MICHAEL LEDEEN
FRANK GAFFNEY
MAX BOOT
GARY BAUER
WILLIAM BENNETT

"Drawing attention to the Jewishness of the neocons is a tricky game. Anyone who does so can count on automatically being smeared as an anti-Semite. But . . . here at *Adbusters*, we decided to tackle the issue head on."

This is vile, yes; it's also preposterous. It's the political equivalent of those numbskulls who think Americans are prudish and uptight about sex, when the truth is we can't shut up about it.

What, in fact, has anyone had to say about the neocons for the last two years *except* to obsess about their Jewishness? The standard left-wing critique of American foreign policy for the past two years runs as follows: "Likudnik, Likudnik, Likudnik; Sharon, Sharon, Sharon; Volfovitz, neocon, PNAC, PNAC; neocon, Likudnik, neocon." And that's the sophisticated, BBC-World-Service version.

Adbusters is indeed engaged in a tricky game, and it's no smear to call it by its proper name. Of the making of lists of Jews, alas, there is no end. ♦

The Not-So-Magical Kingdom

Saudi Arabia wants "visitors to tour the country in order to better understand the kingdom's society and culture"—so read the kingdom's press release last Friday. The release was issued to clear up a misunderstanding about visas "posted on the website of the Saudi Tourism Board" earlier in the week. That business about how "Visas will not be issued for . . . an Israeli passport holder," or for those whose "passport has an Israeli arrival/departure stamp," or for "Jewish People." That information was "erroneous" and "was removed from the website." What's more, Rep. Anthony Weiner, who first called attention to the erroneous material on the website, should not have issued such a statement, because despite that silly web page, "the concerns he raised were not the kingdom's policy. . . . Rep. Weiner and his actions only serve to spread doubt and mistrust." We're glad they cleared that up. And we think we do now "better understand the kingdom's society." ♦

Holy Mackerel

There he goes again. Former Georgia senator Max Cleland is enamored of a choice specimen of American political rhetoric. But he never quite does it justice, and a bit of rhetorical preservation is called for. So let's go to the videotape:

"Cleland . . . reissued his call for a special session of Congress on campaign finance reform, calling the current costly system 'a mackerel in the moonlight; it both shines and stinks.'"

(*Florida Times-Union*, Nov. 4, 1996)

"Mr. Secretary, your decision to change this policy seems to me much like a mackerel in the moonlight," Cleland said. "It both shines and stinks at the same time."

(Decrying a decision by Donald Rumsfeld to remove B-1 bombers from a Georgia base, June 28, 2001)

"Mr. Cleland repeatedly chided Mr. Chambliss [who was about to unseat him in the Senate], accusing him of character assassination and saying once that Mr. Chambliss's commercial was 'like a mackerel in the moonlight—it both shines and stinks at the same time.'"

(*New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2002)

And then last week: "An irate Max Cleland, a Vietnam veteran and the incumbent Chambliss defeated in 2002, responded while campaigning in Georgia for Kerry. 'For Saxby Chambliss, who got out of going to Vietnam because of a trick knee, to attack John Kerry as weak on the defense of our nation is like a mackerel in the moon-

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light that both shines and stinks.'"

(*Washington Post*, Feb. 22, 2004)

Cleland must think this is merely a colorful way to say something or someone "stinks." He misses that the fish stinks because it is dead, and he doesn't grasp the paradox at the heart of the saying.

That's the genius of the original, uttered in the early 19th century by Virginia senator John Randolph of Roanoke about Edward Livingstone, a Louisiana congressman: "He was a man of splendid abilities but utterly corrupt," Randolph said. "Like a rotten mackerel by moonlight, he shines and stinks." ♦

Turn Off the Brites

Okay, fellow hacks, it's not like we didn't warn you. Three months ago, we announced the resumption of THE SCRAPBOOK's campaign against "a particularly annoying trope of Washington journalism—the 'brite,' as such lightweight items are called, reporting that a worthy of one political party had received a direct-mail solicitation from the other party."

This lame genre, we noted, was by definition grossly self-promotional. And it had degenerated to the point that even third-tier pundits were leveraging their way into the gossip columns on the basis of ideologically misdelivered fundraising appeals.

But they don't call us hacks for nothing. The *Washington Post*'s new gossip columnist, Richard Leiby, last week rented out half his column to Joe Wilson—the man who in the fall of 2003 set a new land speed record for the transition from political martyr to self-promoting-bore-who's-worn-out-his-welcome. Someone at the *Post* should have let Leiby know that caving to Wilson's desire to see his name in print is the equivalent of pouring a drink for an alcoholic. Here's the offending item:

> Former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV is probably the last person in America the Bushies should try to hit up. He's the uranium-in-Africa debunker, Iraq war foe and fierce administration critic married to CIA operative Valerie Plame—the leaking of whose name is the subject of a federal grand jury investigation. He is supporting Democrat John Kerry for president. Wilson, an admirer of President George H.W. Bush, had given $1,000 to his son's campaign in 1999, so he remains on the current president's thank-you list.

So this is not even a case of fundraising malpractice (a campaign would be nuts not to re-solicit $1,000 donors). It's a case of wounded amour-propre:

> Wilson recently received . . . a personal call from the Republican National Committee. "The RNC called me at dinner like a telemarketer," Wilson says. "He started in with: 'I want to thank you for all you've done.'
>
> 'Do you know who I am?' Wilson asked the solicitor, who confessed ignorance. "Just tell Ed Gillespie you called Joe Wilson," he said, referring to the RNC chairman. "And put me down for a *no*."

Ho, ho, ho. Ha, ha, ha. Harty-har-har. Hee, hee, hee. You're killing us, Joe. Nothing like the indignity of not being recognized by a telemarketer! Happens to us all the time. But don't worry, we know who you are. ♦

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Casual

Walking Tall Mocha Skim Latte

The other morning, I came to grips with a minor disability. Thrusting aside residual feelings of guilt, I poured my morning coffee into a travel cup. Then I went outside and, walking down the street from my house to Union Station, I drank it.

In the process, I laid to rest the ghost of Mlle Vallet.

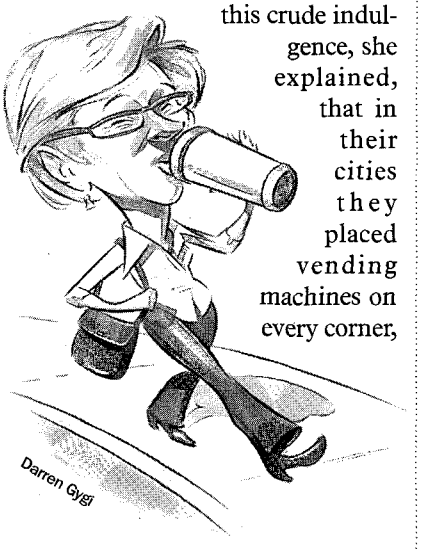
This formidable maiden was in her seventies when she taught me science and math at a small girls' school in Paris in the early 1960s. In appearance, she might have been designed by the creator of *The Simpsons*: Short, wide, and fierce, she had about her an insalubrious whiteness, from the curls upswept on the top of her head, to the puffy double chin, to the strong, preternaturally thick wrists. In a rare personal confidence, she told us she hadn't married because all the good men had been killed off in the First World War.

Mlle Vallet (not her real name) was nothing if not rigorous in her instruction of us in geometry, biology, and elementary physics. Each trimester, our math exam consisted of four hour-long tests, in theorems, proofs of theorems, algebra problems, and geometry problems. She tested us not on a random sample of theorems, but on all the theorems, requiring us to write each one out word for word.

Yet this was no mere pedant. Mlle Vallet believed in educating the whole girl, inculcating discipline—eye contact with the teacher was required at all times—and moral principle. She disapproved of makeup. She was given to recruiting girls to stand on a corner of the Avenue Victor Hugo with a collection box for charity. And she felt a special burden to enlighten us as to the shortcomings of Americans.

One of these was my nation's fanatical insistence upon cleanliness. Compounded by Americans' mania to inoculate themselves against every possible disease, this meant that when they traveled abroad and drank the water, they got sick as dogs. That is just what such stupidity merited, was the implication. Mlle Vallet would sweep the room with her pitiless gaze (I was the only American there) to drive home the perversity.

But this failing of my race was as nothing compared with the revolting habit of eating and drinking in the street. So addicted were Americans to this crude indulgence, she explained, that in their cities they placed vending machines on every corner, the better to avoid having to go even a few paces without a Coca-Cola in hand.



Now, you might say I should have had the strength of character to ignore these diatribes, just as I dismissed Mlle Vallet's proselytizing for her *pendule*, a small, bullet-shaped metal object that hung from a string and was used for divination. Held over a map of the Mediterranean, she told us, just such a *pendule* had yielded vital information about the location of ships in the Second World War.

But I was already on the defensive when it came to manners. Plucked from an American junior high and set down in a milieu where 10-year-olds greeted each other at school by shaking hands, and small girls routinely curtsied to adults, I knew I was hopelessly out of my depth when it came to *politesse*. In the France of those days, every conceivable behavior was either prescribed or prohibited. If a thing *was done*, it must be done. If it *wasn't done*, any girl who did it reaped utmost scorn and the label "badly brought up."

I'm embarrassed to admit it's taken me decades to get over Mlle Vallet's indoctrination. Years after I came back to the States and eventually started working, I still inwardly winced when colleagues walked into meetings carrying their diet colas. Once, an imperious European friend employed by an American firm confided his indignation at a female subordinate who, summoned to his office, had arrived mug in hand. I sympathized entirely—with him.

Slowly, though, it's dawned on me: Nice people sometimes do this, intending no disrespect. The freewheeling young do it, but so do courteous seniors. As a matter of fact, I've gradually come to see, there's no reason why they shouldn't. It's the custom here.

Thunderstruck by this insight, I've started noticing all the provision the consumer economy has made for drinking in transit. Cup holders are everywhere. They pop out of auto dashboards and are built into arm rests. Recently I saw a state-of-the-art stroller with a cup holder in the handle, ready to receive a Bobo mother's designer water or morning latte.

Still, it was a step from realizing that everybody does it to joining in myself. That's the breakthrough that came the other day. An unexpected phone call threw off my morning routine. The coffee steamed invitingly, but there wasn't time to drink it at home. I took the plunge.

It felt like a liberation. I walked, as I drank, with a spring in my step, nodding in solidarity at passing Starbucks patrons. I thought of Mlle Vallet, with her Coke machines and her theorems and her *pendule*, and wished I'd had a flag in my pocket. I would've let it fly.

Claudia Winkler

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The Right Stuff

The invasion of Iraq was indeed the right war—but also for reasons not mentioned in Robert Kagan and William Kristol's "The Right War for the Right Reasons" (Feb. 23).

Access to information on terrorist networks and financing was more forthcoming from other countries once it became clear that the United States was prepared to implement U.N. resolutions and confront the Saddam regime.

Yes, our presence in Iraq has drawn foreign terrorists to the country and increased their efforts to undermine coalition efforts to rebuild the economy and restructure the Iraqi polity.

But terrorists are more likely to lose in long-term confrontations with us in Iraq than if they had been dispersed and prepared for attacks across many borders and on their own timetable. In a sense, the U.S. military has forced the terrorists to adopt tactics more typical of the battlefield than of the civilian landscape. This, too, was a reason for war.

Donna Robinson Divine
Northampton, MA

While I agree with the views expressed in Robert Kagan and William Kristol's "The Right War for the Right Reasons," I'm not sure that they met their stated objective of returning to first principles.

Instead, Kagan and Kristol give the impression that our justification for war in Iraq was the liberation of the oppressed and the restoration of stability in the Middle East.

While those reasons could be enough for some to wage war against Iraq, they do not suffice for sacrificing the lives of our servicemen. Surely our foreign policy must be predicated on defending our nation's interests.

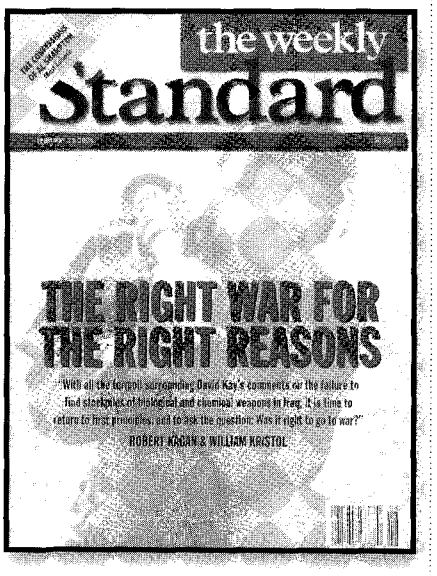
Once you commit the United States to wars to end the oppression of foreign peoples, you also commit the United States to endless wars, for so many people are oppressed today. The better way to help others would be by building an exemplary nation at home.

When America is seriously threatened, as she is currently by militant Islamists, it is distracting to get into entanglements that do not counter that threat.

Allen Weingarten
Morristown, NJ

Bad Marriage

William Kristol and Joseph Bottum's editorial, "For the Marriage Amendment," was a thoughtful, accurate piece on the impact of same-sex marriage on American society (Feb. 23). Those calling for the Federal Marriage Amendment espouse no malice toward gay people. Supporting the amendment is not a judgment on the value of any individual person. The amendment is simply an attempt to preserve one of the oldest social institutions in history.



However, there is one problem that requires more than a constitutional amendment to address. Kristol and Bottum neglect this problem in their editorial. Most clearly stated, it is the rabid secular liberalism that plagues appellate courts throughout the United States today. Liberal secularists have thrown their weight behind the idea of same-sex marriage, just as they did with abortion thirty years ago. And even though liberal secularists are in the extreme minority, they have somehow managed to secure an amazingly disproportionate number of judgeships around the country.

Here's the crux of the matter: Until more Americans wake up to the fact that having liberal judges who impose their own beliefs on the Constitution is detrimental to the system, we will continue to face issues like judicially imposed same-sex marriage. Amending the Constitution in regard to this particular issue will only direct the attention of liberal secularists toward another area of American values. And liberal jurists will continue to positively cackle with glee.

Joseph Woodfin
South Pittsburg, TN

In "For the Marriage Amendment," William Kristol and Joseph Bottum argue brilliantly in favor of the Federal Marriage Amendment, but nonetheless fail to see the larger point beneath the controversy swirling around same-sex marriage and its imposition in the United States.

While it is true, as Kristol and Bottum point out, that "when courts cast their political preferences as constitutional law, only a constitutional amendment can answer them," it is also true that the Constitution was not intended to be amended frivolously or to settle otherwise trivial policy points.

Rather, the timespan of the Constitution is gauged in centuries, not mere years or even decades. People feel this instinctively and will naturally resist an amendment so narrow in scope that it sits small in comparison to the other, more profound additions to our founding document.

The problem that requires fundamental change is not gay marriage but the unchecked power of the federal judiciary itself. The amendment we need would ban raging judicial activism, the elite and unchecked power that is stifling the will of the people and jeopardizing our democracy in increasingly dangerous ways.

Jason Bruce Jones
Canton, GA

William Kristol and Joseph Bottum's editorial in support of a federal marriage amendment deals only with the political effects of state-sanctioned gay marriage.

But few pundits have discussed the

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effect state-sanctioned same-sex marriage would have on current state laws and public policy favoring marriage. For example, if same-sex couples are allowed to marry, or even form civil unions, will states requiring marriage counseling as a precondition to divorce be required to similarly attempt to preserve same-sex marriages?

Or will school districts and even religious institutions be required to give equal time or recognition to same-sex marriages during instruction on the obligations of marriage?

To paraphrase Shakespeare, it seems that there is more to same-sex marriage than has been dreamed of in our ideologies.

MERWYN R. MARKEL
Hallandale Beach, FL

OILIGARCHY

IN "OIL'S WELL . . ." (Feb. 23), Irwin M. Stelzer writes that the Russian government has little incentive to work against OPEC's production policy, since higher oil prices are a boon to the Russian economy. While it is true that Russia's economy does benefit when oil prices are high, Stelzer's argument does not take all the facts into account.

For one thing, Moscow is not known for its compliance with OPEC's production targets. In recent years, the cartel has repeatedly asked Russia to trim exports in order to support OPEC's pricing policy (to keep oil prices at higher levels).

However, Russian officials have generally responded to these requests with little more than vague statements about the need for the stability of world oil markets, as well as sly promises to cut exports by nominal amounts. When such promises are made, they are usually not kept. Russian exports have risen steadily over the last few years despite government officials' assertions of the need to maintain stability in the world oil market.

Moreover, it is not at all clear that Russian production and export levels have much of an effect on oil prices. The world crude market is very sensitive to shifts in OPEC's production policy. That is, prices tend to fluctuate markedly in response to the cartel's pronouncements on production. Shifts in Russian production, however, have much less of an impact on prices. (Indeed, the conventional wisdom among industry analysts is that Russia's ability to affect the course of world oil markets is very limited.)

As a result, even though increases in Russian exports may exert some bearish pressure on prices, the market is being driven mostly by bullish factors—namely, OPEC's efforts to keep prices high. This has created a situation in which Russia has been able to benefit from OPEC's efforts to keep prices high without doing any of the work.

Accordingly, Russia has little, if any, incentive to support OPEC's pricing policy. And the evidence seems to indicate that it has not done so. Russian crude production levels rose by more than 9 percent year-on-year in 2003, while exports rose by nearly 16 percent.

JENNIFER DELAY
Atlanta, GA

THINGS THEY KERRY'D

AS A CONSERVATIVE current affairs junkie who has been loath to turn on the TV lately, I want to thank Fred Barnes for his "Kerry Nation?" (Feb. 23). But I think a few other items to calm Republicans nervous about President Bush's reelection chances (that includes me sometimes) are worth mentioning.

First, the polls and the pundits have been highly volatile recently. Just a month or so ago, most polls showed Bush looking unbeatable, and even liberal pundits were grudgingly acknowledging the Democratic party's likely defeat. Now they say Bush is in trouble. The point is that polls will swing often over the course of the campaign.

Second, the "Kerry phase," as Fred Barnes describes this portion of the campaign, is particularly strong these days because Terry McAuliffe actually succeeded at something for once. Specifically, McAuliffe's frontloaded primary process managed not to backfire, and ended up likely nominating a solid candidate in Senator John Kerry. Once Kerry's luster fades, we will be in the "Bush phase" of the campaign.

It's also worth noting that Bush's strength on the economy will not be fully apparent until late summer. Right now, Bush's economic strengths are apparent only to people who follow the equity markets and financial news. But assuming employment really kicks into high gear this spring, by the time of the November election it's likely that most people will recognize Bush's economic strengths.

Of course, the payroll survey may not kick into higher gear. It has been slower to recover than expected. But look at the numbers from September through January in comparison to those of the prior six months. You'll see a gradual recovery.

For months, some financial analysts have been saying that the employment numbers will shoot up this spring. For Bush's sake, and the country's, let's hope they are right.

JOHN SEPEHRI
Dallas, TX

FRED BARNES IS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT about the impact a clever TV ad can make.

One ad I'd like to see the Bush campaign produce would parody a scene in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* in which the character Gollum, a schizophrenic monster whose personality has been warped by the powerful ring, has an argument with himself.

Only in this ad, it would be John Kerry arguing with himself over his constantly shifting positions.

MIKE PERRY
Seattle, WA

ERRATA

IN TERRY EASTLAND'S "Bush's Gospel," the prescription drug benefit passed by Congress and signed by President Bush last year is said "to cost not what [Bush] first said it would, $400 million over the next 10 years but, according to the latest administration estimate, at least $500 million."

In fact, Bush said the bill would first cost $400 *billion*, and the latest administration estimate has the number at $500 *billion*. ♦

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the weekly Standard

Aristide Must Go

As a growing band of ragtag rebels converged on Port-au-Prince last week, threatening to topple Haitian dictator Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the Bush administration's policy at first appeared hesitant. The situation was admittedly confusing. But happily, by the end of the week, the administration seemed to have reached a correct judgment that before any good can be accomplished, Aristide must go.

The United States has several long-term objectives for Haiti: achieving stable democratic government, building an economy out of aid capital, repairing ecological damage unequaled on the planet, forcing the Colombian cocaine underworld to stop using the country as one of its most important transshipment centers, and preventing a refugee crisis on our shores. Before it can achieve its long-term objectives, the United States can have only one goal in the short term: liberating Haitians from their corrupt and demagogic dictator. This in turn requires a recognition that the United States cannot turn its back on this nation 600 miles from Florida.

Aristide, of course, did not create Haiti's problems, but he profits from all of them. His ten years of direct and indirect rule have been a disaster. His regime has been democratic only in the Haitian sense of one man, one vote, one time. The last free and fair election in Haiti was in 1990, the closely monitored contest that brought Aristide to power. Even then, Aristide was making use of street violence orchestrated by his "vigilance committees." Forced to flee after a September 1991 coup, he spent three years in Washington lobbying for his restoration. In 1994, the Clinton administration intervened to restore Aristide to power, but things quickly went downhill. Four years ago, Aristide received over 90 percent of the vote in a presidential election so transparently corrupt that several American and European agencies reluctantly froze hundreds of millions of dollars in aid money. (Last week, the irony-proof Iowa senator Tom Harkin noted that in that electoral charade, "Aristide got a higher percentage of the vote in Haiti than Bush got in this country.")

With a mystifying regularity reminiscent of Saddam Hussein, Aristide has refused the simplest procedural inducements to unlock millions that could have been used to feed and treat his poorer compatriots. From humble beginnings as a Salesian slum priest (he was expelled from his order in 1988), Aristide has become the richest man in Haiti. How? Last Wednesday in Miami, the Haitian mafioso Beaudoin Ketant, go-between for three Colombian cartels, was sentenced to 27 years in prison for transporting 30 tons of cocaine between Haiti and Florida. At his sentencing, Ketant said that Aristide "is a drug lord. He controlled the drug trade in Haiti. . . . It's a one-man show, your honor. You either pay him or you die."

In the past two years, Aristide created a system of cooperative banks that paid absurd levels of interest. Once the Haitian middle class had invested much of its savings in these banks, the whole system collapsed in a manner reminiscent of the Albanian Ponzi scheme of 1997—perhaps because of a mysterious $90 million loan taken out either by Aristide or by one of his associates. This wipeout of Haiti's already-infinitesimal middle class gave an impetus to street protests against the regime, and led to demonstrations of thousands in front of the presidential palace.

But Aristide has until now been well defended against such unrest, not so much by the police that U.S. consultants had set up for him in the mid-1990s as by two irregular groups. First is his private security detail, made up of former U.S. Special Forces, working under private contract. Second are the lumpen hooligans and released criminals known as "chimeras," who, in whatever numbers are needed, can be armed and paid by Aristide loyalists for deployment against political enemies.

In early December 2003, chimeras beat some uncooperative teachers at a local university, sparking student protests. On December 23, security forces fired into a crowd of peaceful demonstrators in downtown Port-au-Prince, killing a dozen. But none of this would have threatened Aristide had not the chimeras themselves begun to turn on him. Over the holidays, two or three hundred of them protested in front of the Presidential Palace after not having been paid for breaking up a demonstration earlier in the month. In January, some of Aristide's northern gangs—the Cannibal Army in

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Gonaïves, the Red Army and Saddam's Army in Cap-Haïtien—grew discontented with Aristide's attempt to discipline their leaders.

Randall Robinson, founder of TransAfrica and a longtime Aristide apologist, accuses those who seek his removal of "undermining democracy." Democratic presidential near-nominee John Kerry said of Aristide last week, "This democracy is going to be sustained." Both of them misread what has gone on in Haiti since Aristide's return. It is not the "democratic authorities" that are being overthrown in Haiti, but Aristide's retinue of gunmen (who, as we go to press, are reportedly handing out weaponry to loyalists, who in turn are robbing passersby in Port-au-Prince). *That*—and not any "grudge" against a charismatic Marxist slum priest—is why not only the rebels but also the entirety of the democratic opposition have refused to take part in any negotiations that envision Aristide's continuation in power.

France's foreign minister Dominique de Villepin apparently understands this. A week ago, he declared that Aristide bears "grave responsibility" for the current state of low-intensity civil war. At that point, Colin Powell still seemed to be threatening to withhold recognition from any government that replaced Aristide by force, but by the end of the week, Powell had evolved toward the view that Aristide would have to be replaced.

Both France and the United States now appear to see that only those with guns were capable of rising against the Aristide thugocracy. It is true that the armed force that triumphs will likely have elements that we cannot permit to rule, unless we're willing to live through another rebellion 18 months from now. Such elements include not just the old anti-Aristide hard-line opposition of the early 1990s, but also the new anti-Aristide opposition, which was doing Aristide's bidding scant weeks ago. Villepin's call for a peacekeeping force in Haiti, even if it's the knee-jerk European response to Third World crises, should be given serious consideration in this case. It's a way to protect Haiti's democratic forces as they crawl out from under cover and seek to rejoin their country's political life.

As for the task of rebuilding an economy destroyed by kleptocracy, drug dealing, and the U.N. embargo set up to gain Aristide's return in the 1990s, this is work for the long haul that will cost billions, and the United States has no particular monopoly on the expertise and values needed to carry it out. A France that wants to play a role in that effort deserves our respect and gratitude. Nevertheless, America must lead the effort in its area of historic responsibility. With all due respect to M. de Villepin, it is time for Secretary Powell to lay out a plan for a transfer of power that begins to place Haiti on the road to reconstruction.

—Christopher Caldwell, for the Editors

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The White House Gets Engaged

The politics of the marriage amendment.

BY JEFFREY BELL AND FRANK CANNON

PRESIDENT BUSH'S endorsement last week of a constitutional amendment preserving the current understanding of marriage, and the decision of John Kerry and other leading Democrats vehemently to oppose it, ensures that the marriage debate will be front and center in American politics. And it will be prominent not just in 2004, but very likely for a number of election cycles to come.

Until recently, that seemed far from certain. One year ago, gay marriage looked too radical to enter mainstream debate as early as 2004. One week ago, with the photogenic mayor of San Francisco and other local officials rushing to violate state marriage laws with minimal judicial or political opposition, it seemed possible gay marriage would become the American norm with little serious opposition, much as happened with no-fault divorce in the early 1970s.

The seeming paradox traces to one cause: Rarely has there appeared an issue where the gap between elite and popular opinion is so great. A year ago, it was Democratic elites, including and perhaps especially those sympathetic to gay marriage, who wanted to keep this issue in the closet. A week ago, many Republican elites found the idea of capitulating to gay marriage far more attractive than fighting it. Judging from their statements in the wake of the president's announcement, many House and Senate Republicans still hope the issue will fade quickly enough that they won't have to vote on the marriage amendment this year. They are likely to be disappointed.

This is because, in the face of media and elite sympathy for gay marriage, a huge swath of popular opinion appears to be hardening its opposition. Millions of voters are not simply disapproving, as they might be of the Super Bowl halftime show. They seem prepared to change their votes to the extent the marriage debate becomes politically central. For weeks, respected GOP pollster Bill McInturff, not known as a social conservative, has been sharing results of a national poll showing a 4-point Bush lead turning into a 15-point lead should a fight over the definition of marriage become a prominent campaign issue.

Emergence of the marriage debate as the dominant values issue of 2004 is good news for Bush and his political team. It comes at a time when the other two big issue clusters, foreign policy and economics, have become (at least for now) a more even matchup between Bush and Kerry—foreign policy because of our inability to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and the economy because surprisingly few new jobs are so far being created in the midst of a growing economy.

Yet despite the readiness of Democratic and media elites to attribute the president's announcement last week to opportunism, hardly anyone who has spoken to or closely observed the president believes he was eager to engage on this issue. Few politicians welcome a near-universal bad press, which is a certainty for serious opponents of gay marriage. The palpable anger of the White House press corps that accompanied every question in press spokesman Scott McClellan's briefing the day of the president's announcement bore witness to that.

Moreover, Bush has previously gone to considerable length to avoid an open clash with the gay rights movement. For example, the president's faith-based legislation has been stalled on Capitol Hill because of opposition by the gay rights movement to an obscure provision called the ministerial exemption, which permits participating faith-based ministries to avoid hiring gays if the practice of homosexuality is anathema to their faith. Though widely known on Capitol Hill, this opposition has never been mentioned as a factor, much less criticized, by Bush or his team.

Only a few weeks ago, before the high court of Massachusetts issued its edict that only gay marriage, rather than Vermont-style civil unions, would meet its understanding of the two-century-old Massachusetts constitution, it was quite possible that the 2004 version of the marriage issue would have been a state-level debate over civil unions—one with limited impact on the presidential campaign. But a 4-3 judicial majority in John Kerry's home state decided that that was not to be—that the only "constitutional" response by the legislature is full-fledged gay marriage, with its inevitable carryover to the federal tax system, Social Security, estate taxation, and all the rest.

Remarkably, in Thursday night's Democratic presidential debate in California, John Edwards said the reason he would have voted against the Defense of Marriage Act, had he been in the Senate in 1996, is that he disagrees with denying the full range of federal marriage benefits to gay partners in any state that enacts gay marriage. So much for the fiction that national Democrats will allow the marriage debate to plod along as a state-by-state issue.

As for the normally adroit Kerry, a baffling exchange in the same California debate with reporter Ron Brownstein seemed to leave him with the

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following positions: He is happy to have voted against the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, but he no longer believes, as he did then, that DOMA is unconstitutional. He is against DOMA now, but thinks Congress probably shouldn't repeal it. He is in favor of the definition of marriage as involving a husband and a wife, but any congressional effort to codify this Kerry position would be polarizing, "gay bashing," or (most likely) both.

As this performance suggests, Democrats are both uncomfortable with where they are and stuck with it for now. Congressional Democrats are nearly unanimous against the Marriage Amendment, and thus any near-term vote count will show that the needed two-thirds majority is not possible in either house. Timid Republican congressional leaders will no doubt try to conclude that holding such votes in 2004 is a bad idea because "the votes are not there."

In the wake of the president's endorsement, this kind of contrived escape is the one thing that could make the GOP a net loser in this year's marriage debate. Now that he is committed on this issue, the president will need to make sure that House and Senate votes take place before the election, because only with stark, recorded, up-or-down votes will the Republicans clearly be seen by the electorate as the party that is serious about taking action to defend marriage. Because the national Democrats have no intention of openly advocating gay marriage, the lack of a vote on the constitutional amendment designed to prevent it would leave the two parties' positions on the issue muddled and hard to distinguish.

George W. Bush did not take the oath of office 37 months ago thinking he would have to fight for the Judeo-Christian definition of marriage—any more than he expected to be fighting a world war against Islamist terrorism. But as his foes have learned, strong leaders step up not just to the goals they campaigned on, but to challenges they never could have imagined. ♦

Popcorn and Passion

In which two moviegoers conduct their own interfaith dialogue. BY MATT LABASH

AT LAST WEEK'S OPENING OF Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, I never expected actually to see Jesus. Yet there he was, carnival-barking on the Connecticut Avenue sidewalk outside the Avalon Theatre in Washington, D.C. He stood out in his long brown hair and tunic. "Blessed are the merciful—go vegetarian!" he cried. But something wasn't right. It might have been the disciple carrying the "For Christ's sake, go veg" sign. Or maybe it was the mouth-hole on his beard riding up over his nose that gave him away as a PETA impostor. "Are you having trouble there?" I asked, motioning to his beard-wig. "I am," he said, "but not as much trouble as the animals."

One could hardly fault Fake Jesus for exploiting *The Passion*—he's merely the latest in a long line. Observing their 11th Commandment—Thou Shalt Not Waste a Marketing Tie-in—Christian merchandisers have cranked out everything from Bibles with the cinematic Jesus, James Caviezel, on the cover, to pewter nail pendants. The going joke among secular editorialists is what's next, Jesus action figures? But seasoned evangelicals like me know that those are old news. You can already get them at *jesuschristsuperstore.net*, including one that comes with "Ninja-Messiah throwing nails" and a "killer-cross" pump-action shotgun.

Across the interfaith aisle, Jewish groups have been shameless in their own way. For the better part of a year, everyone from the Anti-Defamation League to the Simon Wiesenthal Center has cast anti-Semitic aspersions on Gibson. Exercised over Gibson's depiction of the Jewish high priests in his mostly faithful rendering of the four gospels, most of them have done so before seeing the film. In both the gospels and Gibson's depiction, the priests are the catalysts behind Jesus' crucifixion, even though the ambivalent and wormy Roman procurator Pontius Pilate actually puts Him to death. Gibson's critics claim that the Jews will again be blamed for deicide, which has historically led to violence. The ADL's Abe Foxman has said, hyperbolically, that Gibson's telling of Christianity's central narrative is a "setback to more than 40 years of Jewish-Christian relations."

Gibson has responded that these critics don't have a problem with his film, so much as with the book it was adapted from. The narrative necessarily implicates Jews and Romans, since there weren't many Norwegians around at the time. But plenty of Jews come off well—Jesus and Mary for instance. Gibson has also infused his film with secondary sympathetic Jewish portraits, by turning into minor heroes characters such as Simon of Cyrene, who was enlisted to help Jesus carry the cross, but who didn't rate a speaking part in the gospels. And thoughtful Christians have pointed out that it is heresy to assign blame for who crucified Christ, since we all did, which was the entire point of His willing, redemptive sacrifice. (Gibson drives this home by depicting his own hand pounding the spikes into Jesus'.)

But there are other important con-

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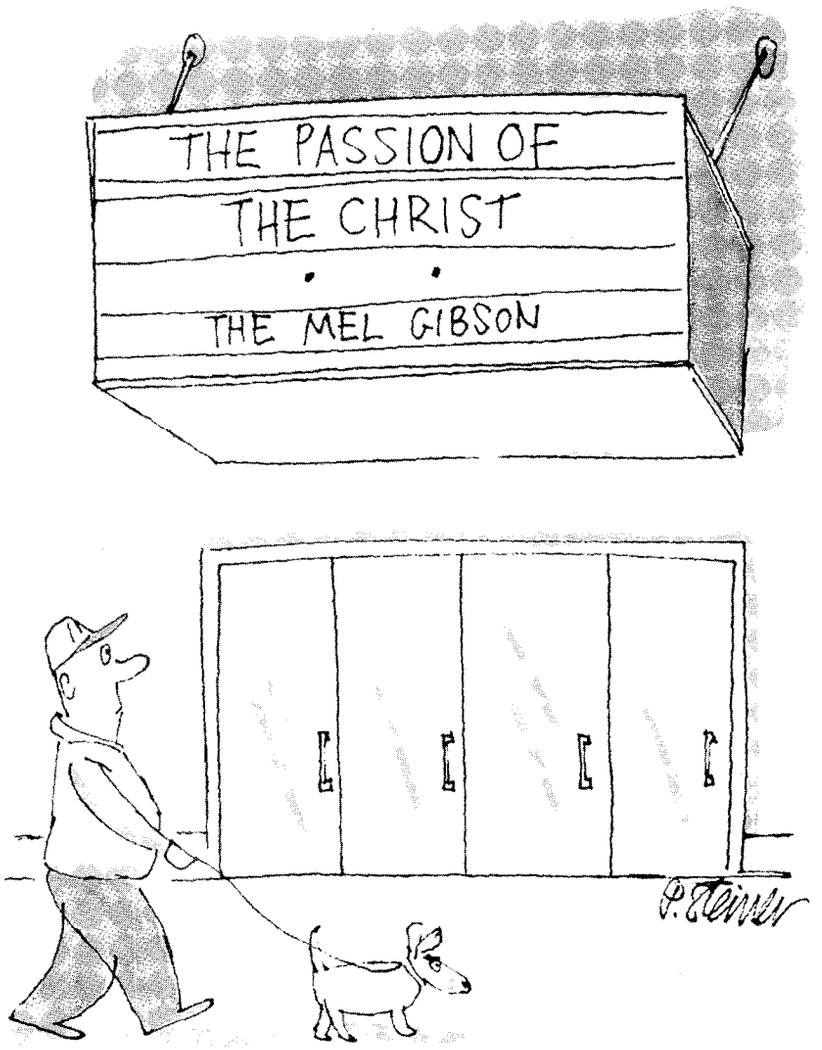

Peter Steiner

cerns in the Avalon Theatre on opening night, such as what to eat? Attending what is perhaps the most violent non-snuff film ever made, it seems inappropriate to down a greasy tub of popcorn while watching our Lord and Savior get tortured for two hours. (When I voiced this concern, a colleague slipped me a "Bible Bar," which contains "the seven foods of Deuteronomy," such as figs and pomegranates.) When I buy a Diet Coke, the concessions girl tells me business is way down for the aforementioned reason. But it doesn't bother Norm Linsky, happily munching popcorn in the lobby. "A movie without popcorn is not a movie," Linsky says, unapologetically.

I shake Linsky's hand, and introduce myself. "I'm a journalist," I say. "I'm a Jew," he responds, mentioning that he's also executive director of a cardiologists' association. We take our seats together, and fall into an easy rapport. Linsky seems to be enjoying the sound and fury. Outside, in line, he tells me, he conversed with a "group of church ladies" with Ash-Wednesday smudges on their foreheads, who were talking about PETA Jesus. He told them it made him want a cheeseburger. "Yeah, with mushrooms," they said. They didn't know he was Jewish ("don't ask, don't tell," he says), but they were saying "very kind, lovely things" like, "We don't blame the Jews." We talk about how the theater had received a phone threat—purportedly from an angry Jewish guy who was outraged that the theater's Jewish manager chose to show *The Passion*. In the back of the theater, two cops are present, perhaps to make sure the Jews and Christians don't turn into the Jets and Sharks, what with all the talk of anti-Semitic overtones, or perhaps just to guard against the phone bully. "Don't worry," offers Norm, in the event of a Jewish uprising. "You're with me. You'll be okay."

Norm, who loves Gibson's *Mad Max* movies, though "I suspect this will be different," religiously attends synagogue, and tells me his son was scandalized that he would come to see this movie. But Norm was tired of talk-show gasbags telling him what he should think. He came here like he occasionally goes to Christian churches on safari, not to have meaningful religious experiences outside his own faith tradition, but "just to know."

We watch *The Passion* together, as Jesus gets slapped and beaten and scourged until his body is transformed from solid to liquid, with loose bunches of skin hanging as if from a reptile trying to molt. We watch His mother, of Hail Mary/lawn statue fame, become a flesh-and-blood mother, unable to help her helpless boy, who's being tortured, as she's tortured herself by the knowledge that He's not helpless at all, that His death is by choice. Norm Linsky and I sit there in the dark, our senses overwhelmed at the sheer viciousness and brutality, and watch Jesus die for our sins. Or, as Norm would probably prefer, we watch Jesus die for my sins.

When the lights come up, I'm pretty much speechless. Norm isn't. "Whoa! Mel did a good job, glad I saw it for myself." The depiction of the Jewish priests, he says, is "no big deal"—even though he thinks they looked like they were from "a bad dinner-theater production of the *Merchant of Venice*" (the Romans came off as Nazi caricatures from a World War II movie, he adds). Norm whispers that he has a prediction: "There's not gonna be any rioting in the streets tonight. Get a life, people,

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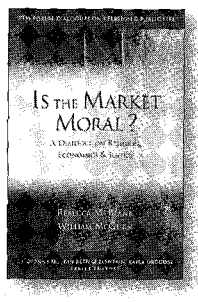

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it's just a movie. And a good one." Norm's glad he came, he says, because this has people "talking about some core issues about belief." It has him talking "to the church ladies out in line," and "a fine reporter from a fine magazine, as opposed to me going to a mindless movie where people are blowing stuff up for the hell of it."

Norm's right, sort of. We stick around for a theater-sponsored interfaith panel discussion between clergy. It sounds like the setup to a bad joke: A Lutheran, a Catholic, two Baptists, and a rabbi walk into a movie theater. . . . The panel is moderated by Rev. Clark Lobenstine, a Presbyterian minister from the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, who specializes in endeavors like "interfaith dialoguing" and "fostering mutual understanding." Lobenstine is ideal for the job. He is timid and inoffensive and wears his sensitivity credentials proudly, as evidenced by his canvas, public-television-pledge-drive tote bag (he's a presidential club member).

He intones that in 25 years of dialogues, this is the most difficult thing he's done, which would seem odd, since Christ's crucifixion, historically speaking, is a cow that's been out of the stable for a good 2,000 years. The rabbi, feeling slightly outnumbered at one point, offers that the New Testament gives his ilk "the willies," but the rest of the panel takes care not to throw theological elbows or, for the most part, discuss Jesus very much at all (the Baptists, being Baptists, try to sneak in a few J-bombs and salvation themes, but without much vigor).

If the clergy seem to prefer their religion toothless, the audience bares its fangs. While I'd hoped people would discuss the implications of what Christ's death on the cross meant or didn't mean to them, most just want to elbow Him aside and climb up on the cross themselves. One grievance group after another airs its concerns. A Lutheran minister thinks the Romans got shafted in the picture, and an elderly woman who worked with concentration camp survivors reads from her speech decrying the film as anti-Semitic, one she'd obviously written before she'd even seen it. A female Disciple of Christ minister in a zebra-skin kufi wanted to know why there weren't more faiths represented on the panel to drive home the "message of the multicultural church, praise God!" and why Simon of Cyrene wasn't portrayed by an African. Sitting there listening, I was unsure if we'd just watched *The Passion* or *Rashomon*.

The only real interfaith dialogue I hear all night occurs between me and Norm Linsky. We clearly communicate an uncomfortable truth, but a truth nonetheless, which brings us to mutual understanding (Lobenstine would be proud). Norm understands that I believe that Messiah-wise, he is waiting for a train that has already left the station. And that when the Messiah comes round again, it's not going to be to conduct nerf-bat interfaith dialogues. I understand that Norm believes that I believe in Santa Claus, albeit, one with nail-prints in His hands.

"We will always disagree," I say. "Agreed," he agrees. There is no enmity in this dawning. Just an understanding of sorts, to be agreeable in our disagreement, without apology that what we profess as mattering most to us, actually should. And Norm understands, I think, that despite his rejection of that which I find most sacred, I will love him anyway, or at least like him a lot since we just met, because the God I hold sacred commanded me to, and because it's easy in Norm's case, since he offered me popcorn, even though I was all set with my Bible Bar.

On the way out, I play the part of the dutiful evangelical anyway, and ask Norm if, after watching the movie, he has any desire to switch teams. He smiles, and claps me on the shoulder while handing me a card. "I think I'm sticking with the senior circuit," he says, nodding at the curtained screen, "but I have new respect for the junior circuit." ♦

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Patriot Games

Why is John Kerry so defensive about his national security record? BY FRED BARNES

HERE'S A DOG that won't hunt: John Kerry's accusation that President Bush's reelection campaign is questioning his patriotism. This elevates a Democratic refrain—if we disagree with Bush on national security, we're called unpatriotic—to a ridiculous new height. In Kerry's case, his record on defense, intelligence, and foreign policy has been criticized by Republican national chairman Ed Gillespie and Sen. Saxby Chambliss of Georgia. Theirs were conventional attacks by supporters of one candidate on an opponent's record. Neither got much media attention, but the response by Kerry was indeed newsworthy. He wants his votes and positions on national security to be immune to criticism—in effect, off the table in the presidential campaign.

Quite a clever move by Kerry, no? There'd been a question about how he might exploit his service in Vietnam against Bush—other than to contrast it with Bush's non-combat stint in the Texas National Guard. Now we know. Any suggestion he's been weak on national security in his political career, including 19 years in the Senate, is out of bounds, illegitimate, a *verboten* questioning of his patriotism. Having served in Vietnam, Kerry says, is proof of consistent support for a strong national defense. On this, he "takes a back seat" to no one. If you say otherwise, you're playing dirty politics.

Will Kerry's bid to remove his greatest vulnerability work? It doesn't look like it. The Bush campaign puts its first wave of ads on television this week, and they're positive. That will change soon. Kerry's record will be scrutinized, and not favorably. Bush has already declared the campaign is about two choices, one on the economy, the other on national security. At a fundraiser in Louisville last week, the president said the election on November 2 "is a choice between an America that leads the world with strength and confidence or an America that is uncertain in the face of danger."

Gillespie first attacked Kerry at a Republican National Committee meeting in January. He said Kerry had, among other things, sought to slash the intelligence budget as the terrorist threat increased in the 1990s. Later he criticized Kerry in a conference call with reporters, then again last week at a press conference in which he played TV clips of Kerry. In one, Kerry invoked his "35 years of experience in international security, foreign policy and military affairs. And I think that makes an enormous difference" in the presidential race. Chambliss also went after Kerry in a conference call. His strongest criticism was that Kerry has "a 32-year history of voting to cut defense programs and defense systems."

After the initial attack, Gillespie says, the Kerry campaign dispatched a fundraising letter accusing the Republican chairman of "another desperate attack on the patriotism of John Kerry." Following the criticism by Chambliss, Kerry went further, issuing a statement and sending a letter to Bush. "I'm not going to stand by and let the likes of Saxby Chambliss and the Republican party question my commitment to keeping our nation strong," the Kerry statement said. "We're not going to let them make this about a war 34 years ago." In fact, Chambliss's criticism covered only Kerry's years in politics, not his time in Vietnam. Kerry added: "Republicans like to question the patriotism of Democrats who question their direction of our nation."

In the letter to the president, Kerry insisted Bush and his campaign had "initiated a widespread attack on my service in Vietnam, my decision to speak out to end that war, and my commitment to the defense of the nation. . . . I will not sit back and allow my patriotism to be challenged." Of course neither Bush nor his campaign had criticized Kerry's record in Vietnam or said anything unfavorable about it. On the contrary, Republicans routinely laud his Vietnam service. Kerry also faulted Bush for "campaign attacks against me," though Kerry himself has made sharp criticism of Bush a staple of his campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. The Bush campaign says Kerry has run the first 15 negative ads of the 2004 campaign "directly attacking President Bush."

Accusing Republicans of raising doubts about their patriotism has become standard fare for Democrats, especially Kerry. The tactic is designed to tar criticism as extreme and ill-motivated. Kerry prefaced his remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations last November with this comment: "I know what the Bush apologists will say to this—that it is unpatriotic to question, to criticize, and to call **for** change." Neither before nor afterwards has anyone accused him of being unpatriotic. When Edward Kennedy, the most prominent Kerry backer, said Bush started the war in Iraq for political gain, he brushed aside criticism as an attack on "the patriotism of those who question them." His patriotism, however, had not been questioned.

Throughout his campaign, Kerry has cited former Georgia senator Max Cleland, who lost three limbs in Vietnam, as a victim of Republican charges of being unpatriotic. He

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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was defeated in 2002 by Chambliss, whom Kerry characterized in the letter to Bush as "a man elected to the U.S. Senate on the back of one of the most despicable campaigns ever conducted." He and other Democrats cite a TV ad criticizing Cleland for voting against a homeland security bill and featuring pictures of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. The ad was harsh, and Democratic senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who backed Cleland and is now supporting Bush's reelection, says it hinted at a lack of patriotism. But Miller says Cleland lost because he was forced by Democratic leaders to vote 11 times against a Homeland Security Department. And Chambliss insisted in the 2002 campaign he was not questioning Cleland's patriotism, only his judgment.

Marc Racicot, the Bush campaign chairman, answered Kerry's letter to Bush and sought to turn the dispute against Kerry. "Your letter claims that supporters of our campaign questioned your service and patriotism," Racicot wrote to Kerry. "In fact, that simply wasn't true." Racicot asked Kerry to halt the "remarkably negative tone" of his campaign. He also cited 11 weapons systems "that are winning the war on terror" and that Kerry voted against. Racicot left the distinct impression we'll be hearing more on this later. ♦

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The Nader Haters

Ralph loses old friends, and makes some new ones. BY MATTHEW CONTINETTI

IN JANUARY, JOHN PEARCE started a website devoted to discouraging Ralph Nader from running for president. Four years ago, Pearce, a 49-year-old businessman, supported Al Gore. He watched in horror as Nader, then the Green party candidate for president, siphoned off progressive votes from Gore in several key states like Florida. Pearce, who lives in California, a state that Gore won handily, thinks Nader played the spoiler in the 2000 election. Were it not for Nader, he feels, Al Gore would be president today.

Pearce is not alone in thinking so. His *RalphDontRun.net* website, which features a humorous anti-Nader "web movie," became a pilgrimage site for progressives who feared another Nader run. When I first spoke to Pearce in mid-February, he told me that the response to *RalphDontRun* had been "overwhelming." Ten thousand people a day were visiting the site, which had been featured in the *New York Times*. Pearce had been interviewed on NPR and CNN. He had written an op-ed that ran in regional papers like the *San Jose Mercury News* and the *Hartford Courant*. Discouraging Nader from running again, he told me, had become his "full-time job." He was a man with a mission.

The mission, of course, failed miserably. On February 22, Nader announced on *Meet the Press* that he was launching his third campaign for president, this time as an independent. Because of the time difference between Washington and California, John Pearce did not see the *Meet the Press* interview until three hours after the show originally aired. But he said that he knew Nader was running before he watched the show. "We got 50,000 hits on Sunday," he told me last week. "We're up to 265,000 visitors to our site. It's just wild."

No one should have been surprised by Nader's announcement. Beginning last October, when Nader set up a presidential exploratory committee, it was clear that the activist wanted to run again. Around the time John Pearce set up his website, Nader began visiting radio and television studios, complaining that the country lives under a "two-party duopoly" which creates a "democracy gap." He said efforts by people like John Pearce to steer him away from the race were "contemptuous."

Democrats have several theories as to why Nader decided to run. Bill Richardson, the governor of New Mexico, told Fox News that Nader's candidacy was an act of "ego." Pearce said he thought Nader was running out of "spite." Micah Sifry, a former editor of the *Nation* and the author of *Spoiling for a Fight*, a study of third-party politics, said the run was the result of "a kind of stubborn devotion to principle." One progressive told me he thought Nader was concerned about his legacy.

Here's why Nader would be concerned about his legacy. In 2000, he and the Green party received 2.7 percent of the national vote. It wasn't enough for the party to receive federal matching funds. But it *was* enough for Nader to earn the title of spoiler. Nader received 97,488 votes in Florida. Gore lost the state to Bush by 537

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votes. In New Hampshire, Gore lost by 7,211 votes. Nader received 22,188.

Democrats are confident Nader won't have the same impact on this year's presidential race as he did in 2000. Donna Brazile, Al Gore's campaign manager in 2000, said the political landscape has shifted as a result of Bush's election. "Base vote will be an important factor for both parties," she told me. "Nader won't have as much oxygen to suck up as he did in 2000, when he ran to Gore's left on many issues."

Thomas F. Schaller, a political scientist at the University of Maryland, said the Democrats approached the 2004 election differently from the 2000 race. Schaller said that John Kerry, the likely Democratic nominee, ran a base-center campaign in 2004, which means he focused more on locking up key left-liberal constituencies during the primary fight than appealing to the moderate center. "Now Democrats can ignore Nader and not damage the base," Schaller said.

"If the 2000 election was a referendum on Clinton-Gore," said Micah Sifry, "there was room for a sizable progressive protest vote—which is what Nader really embodied." But we are now almost four years removed from the Clinton administration's treacly liberalism. Now "it's a referendum on Bush-Cheney," said Sifry. "The question for progressives is, Do you want four more years of this?" Sifry thinks the answer is obviously "no," and that progressives are likely to rally behind the Democratic nominee.

Will they? Imagine a college-aged pacifist living in Miami. He was against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was against both Bush tax cuts. He is vehemently anti-Bush. But when he looks at Senator John Kerry, he finds the senator's positions on some issues are closer to Bush's than he would like to admit. For example, Kerry voted for Bush's No Child Left Behind education bill. He voted for the Patriot Act. He voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq.

Furthermore, Kerry, as much as he criticizes the Bush administration's foreign policy, does not advocate an immediate, unilateral withdrawal from Iraq—a position popular with the antiwar left. Nader does. And when our pacifist looks at Kerry's tax policy, he notices the senator would preserve the Bush tax cuts for people making under $200,000 a year. Nader would scrap the whole thing.

Such reasoning is enough to worry some on the left. Nader might not receive the tens of thousands of votes

Earl Keleny

in select states that he received in 2000, one anti-Nader progressive tells me, but in today's highly polarized political landscape, only a few thousand—or a few hundred—votes for Nader could be enough to swing the election to Bush. Again.

Before Nader can even begin to reprise his role as presidential spoiler, though, he must find a way to get on the ballot. When he ran for president on the Green party ticket, Nader was on the ballot in 43 states and Washington, D.C. Now he is not on the ballot anywhere. Richard Winger, the editor of *Ballot Access News*, a newsletter that tracks third-party politics, says the problem this presents for Nader's candidacy is not insurmountable. In 1980, John Anderson did not declare his independent candidacy until April 24 and was able to get on the ballot in all 50 states. The things Nader needs most, Winger said, are money and volunteers.

But Nader has raised just $175,000 so far for his campaign. And on *Meetup.com*, a rough indicator of grassroots support, only 1,397 people have signed up to attend Nader Meetups worldwide. That's not exactly a groundswell (John Kerry has 54,757 people attending his Meetups). In 2000, Nader filled Madison Square Garden to capacity. Now he would be lucky to fill McSorley's saloon. His reputation as spoiler has cost him many friends.

But he has made new ones. In January, Nader attended a conference called "Choosing an Independent President 2004," held in Bedford, New Hampshire. What made Nader's appearance at the conference noteworthy wasn't so much the content of his speech. It was who he delivered the speech to. Sitting on the dais as Nader addressed the crowd were the event's organizers: Lenora Fulani, Fred Newman, Jacqueline Salit, Omar Ali, and Jim Mangia, all associated at one time or another with the New Alliance party, a now defunct political group that the FBI once described as "armed and dangerous." Adam Reilly, who covered the event for the Boston *Phoenix*, noted that most of the attendees were associated with the New Alliance movement as well.

New Alliance's history is a storied one. It was founded by Newman, a Stanford-trained psychoanalyst and onetime acolyte of Lyndon LaRouche. It was considered part of the far-left fringe. For many, Newman, whose disciples are schooled in something called "friendosexuality" and told to donate their life savings to his

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cause, is more a cult leader than a political figure. Fulani, an African-American Marxist and supporter of Louis Farrakhan, ran as the New Alliance candidate for president in 1988 and 1992. But she is most famous for serving briefly as the co-chair of Pat Buchanan's Reform party presidential campaign in 2000. Today, Fulani serves on the executive committee of New York's Independence party, which is controlled by Newman and his followers.

"Choosing an Independent President 2004" also featured appearances by emissaries from the campaigns of Democratic presidential candidates Wesley Clark and Dennis Kucinich. The conference concluded without endorsing a presidential candidate. Last week, however, Fulani told me she was endorsing Nader. "I think it's pretty cool," she said. "I think Nader is a distinguished independent and he needs to be supported."

Fulani's endorsement means that Nader will likely be on the New York state ballot as the nominee of the Independence party. It also means that Nader has access to Fulani and Newman's activists. "They have developed a network of people, and in most states they have a whole stable of attorneys who are incredibly savvy about election law," says Chip Berlet, a senior analyst at Political Research Associates, a progressive group. "They are real experts in this area, and they can deliver the state-level expertise and the state-level *people* to actually get Nader on the ballot."

But Fulani's support comes with a price. If Nader continues to reach out to Fulani, he will likely follow in the footsteps of Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan, whose work with the New Alliance crowd hastened—or maybe completed—their migration to the political fringe. When I offered this theory to Berlet last week, he chuckled. "You're talking about someone who is standing on a very tiny ice floe pulling up someone else with them on it," Berlet said, "and asking, Does it make them more isolated?" He paused. "It's hard to be more isolated than Nader is already." ♦

A Fitting End for the Comanche

The Army shoots down its helicopter.

BY JOHN R. GUARDIANO

IT'S AN AXIOM IN WASHINGTON that government programs never die, and they don't fade away either. Instead, they invent new rationales to perpetuate their existence ad infinitum. So it was rather stunning when, last Monday, the Army announced the cancellation of its prized $39 billion Comanche armed reconnaissance helicopter program.

Credit the dramatic about-face to the Army's new chief of staff, Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker. The former head of the U.S. Special Operations Command was brought out of retirement last August by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to shake up an Army many observers think has become too bureaucratized and sclerotic for 21st-century battles.

Canceling Comanche is Schoomaker's most audacious move so far. It shows he's not afraid to exercise his command over the Army's hidebound bureaucracy. As if to underline this point, Schoomaker, with acting Army Secretary Les Brownlee, announced the decision while Rumsfeld was in Iraq, and he made clear it was a total Army decision.

It is "very, very important to emphasize that this is an Army initiative," he said. It results from "our studies, and it is about fixing Army aviation for the future—for today and for tomorrow—not just about terminating Comanche.

"It's a big decision," he continued. "We know it's a big decision. But it's the right decision. And I think when you take a look at the specifics . . . you'll come to that conclusion."

It's difficult to dispute Schoomaker's logic. With ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army has urgent unfulfilled aviation requirements. The service's most pressing need is for new countermeasure systems to neutralize the ubiquitous threat posed by rocket-propelled grenades, shoulder-fired missiles, and man-portable air-defense systems, all of which are growing in sophistication and lethality.

"We've had nine confirmed helicopters shot down with the loss of 32 lives" in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Lt. Gen. Richard A. Cody, the Army's deputy chief of staff for operations, at the press conference.

The Comanche is a fine and even revolutionary helicopter, but it lacks countermeasures, and equipping the aircraft with survivability systems would be prohibitively expensive, Schoomaker said. Moreover, such upgrades would "take away from its primary stealth capability," he noted.

The Army would prefer to replenish its existing fleet of aircraft, especially for the Reserve and National Guard, which remain the service's neglected stepchildren. This is important because Guard and Reserve units are included in the troop rotations in Iraq; yet, their equipment typically is older, substandard, and not always interoperable with the regular Army.

Moreover, by accelerating technological upgrades to existing aircraft like the AH-64D Apache Longbow, the Army can fulfill much of the Comanche's mission profile at a fraction of the cost of a new helicopter.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which are a Pentagon priority, also

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can be used for armed reconnaissance missions. And with a joint, interservice force increasingly a reality, the Army expects to utilize the reconnaissance capabilities provided by other services and platforms.

In short, the Army could spend $14 billion on Comanche through 2011, or it could use that same money to recapitalize its $100 billion aircraft fleet. The service could procure 121 Comanches, or it could acquire 796 new aircraft while simultaneously upgrading 1,400 decrepit helicopters and airplanes.

Given the rapid pace of technological advancements, what with UAVs and digital connectivity, and given the current and future threat environment, the Army decided to do the latter and not the former. The Comanche, service officials decided, was a relatively bad investment, a Cold War relic no longer suitable for the 21st-century battlefield.

"If you take a look at when Comanche was envisioned, starting in 1983, and you take a look at the threat that we faced at that time, and the kind of battlefield that we envisioned, Comanche made a lot of sense, but it makes less sense today as we go forward," Schoomaker said.

That's the problem with a long, drawn-out procurement process that extends over more than two decades: Technology outstrips the program and nothing useful gets fielded. It's a problem that plagues all of military procurement and not just the Comanche.

The Special Operations Command, though, has its own, unique, streamlined procurement process, which enables it to secure cutting-edge equipment in a timely fashion. As the former head of that command, Schoomaker knows the system well and reportedly is eager to adopt it, in modified form, for the regular Army.

The service still requires a new armed reconnaissance helicopter; however, it will be procuring far fewer and much less expensive aircraft (an estimated 368 helicopters versus 650 Comanches) for niche reconnaissance missions.

"The bottom line is 70 percent of the current fleet that we have we'll be able to either upgrade, recapitalize, and buy new, compared with trading off [or buying] 121 Comanches," Cody explained.

But such benefits accrue only if all of the displaced Comanche money is applied to Army aviation programs. Schoomaker said he has been assured by President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld that it will happen; however, service officials are skeptical. For years, they note, Army aviation has suffered a mismatch between requirements and resources. "Money has a way of disappearing and promises have a way of evolving," one official observed.

The late Comanche

Getty / Getty Images

In fact, the Army's perennial failure to fund Comanche adequately contributed mightily to the program's incessant delays and unfulfilled promise. "We never could bring enough money to bear on the program to really move it forward quickly," says John Douglas, president and chief executive officer of the Aerospace Industries Association and a former assistant secretary of the Navy in the Clinton administration. "I think . . . the program was more limited by the amount of money per year they could spend on it than it was by technological issues."

The Army's share of the Pentagon budget has remained constant, at roughly 25 percent in recent decades. Yet, the service is bearing the overwhelming brunt of the burden for overseas deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kosovo. So funding remains a serious concern.

Some politicians are squawking about the Comanche cancellation. Mostly, these are Connecticut pols, because the Comanche's lead manufacturer, Sikorsky, is based in Connecticut. Still, the program surely will remain terminated. That's because unlike the Crusader howitzer, which Rumsfeld killed two years ago over the strenuous objections of the Army, the Comanche is being scrapped by the Army itself.

What's more, the Army has agreed to use much of the displaced Comanche money to upgrade Guard and Reserve aircraft, and that's always politically popular back home, especially today, in light of the grave dangers faced by soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Pentagon will incur cancellation fees of between $450 million and $680 million, but that pales in comparison to the $30-billion-plus that would have been spent had the Comanche program continued.

Critics complain that the $6.9 billion already invested in the aircraft was squandered, but that's not completely true. As Schoomaker observed, new technologies developed for Comanche will be incorporated into the military's industrial base and used on future joint rotorcraft. To take two examples, the Army requires a vastly more capable vertical heavy-lift aircraft by as early as 2012, and a joint-service, multirole helicopter is planned for the 2020 time frame.

Equally important but less heralded is that Schoomaker has shown leadership can make a difference; government programs can indeed be terminated. Now, if only such leadership were exerted throughout the federal government. ♦

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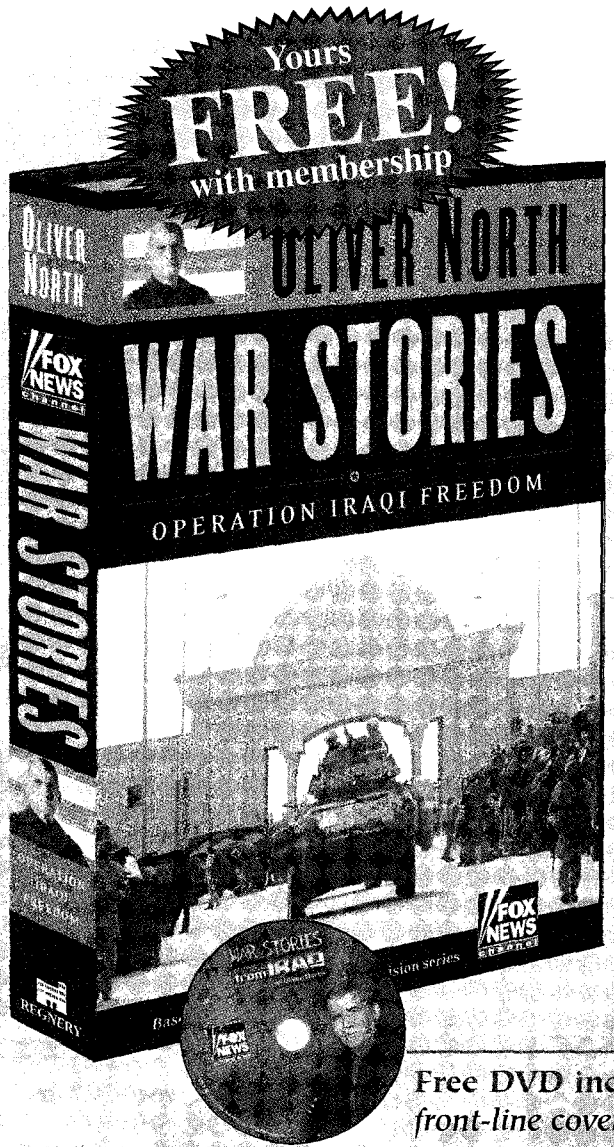
On the ground in Iraq with Oliver North



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Who's Afraid of George Soros?

Campaign finance reform bites the hands that passed it.

By David Tell

Advocacy Groups Permitted to Use Unlimited Funds . . . Ruling Favors Democrats
—*New York Times*, lead story, February 19

FEC Moves to Regulate Groups Opposing Bush
—*Washington Post*, same day

1 **You know, I remember reading those stories. And I remember being totally confused by them. Should I be embarrassed?** No: We're talking about federal election law, here. Almost *nobody* understands this stuff. And besides, the coverage itself was confused. Even people who do understand federal election law couldn't make heads or tails of it. According to the *Times*, the Federal Election Commission has given a green light to certain political outfits that are planning to raise and spend "unlimited" amounts of money against President Bush in the upcoming election—but the agency is requiring those groups to operate "under far more restrictive rules." Which doesn't sound "unlimited" at all, does it?

That business in the *Times* about the FEC's decision having a potentially "profound" effect on this year's presidential race, "by helping Democrats"? Well, that wasn't quite right, either. Actually, there's no way in hell the commission's February 18 ruling—and related, still-pending rulings that might logically follow—could possibly help the Democratic party.

What's just happened at the FEC may be the best news George W. Bush will get all year.

2 **Whoa, back up a minute. What exactly did the FEC *do* on February 18?** The commission responded to a request for legal guidance from "Americans for a Better Country" (ABC), an unincorporated and "nonconnected" (i.e., unofficial) Republican group organized under Section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code. With the announced goal of helping to "reelect President Bush and defeat the Democratic nominee," ABC had established a bank account—registered as a "political committee" with the FEC—from which it intended to make various direct and undisguised presidential campaign expenditures. Consistent with longstanding law governing fundraising for such expenditures, deposits in this account, ABC's "federal" account, would consist only of contributions from individuals and other political committees, and in limited amounts: $5,000 per donor per year.

As an unincorporated and nonconnected enterprise, however, ABC also claimed it retained authority to solicit considerably larger contributions from a much broader array of sources: the "soft money"—provided by corporations, labor unions, and wealthy individuals—that the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (the McCain-Feingold bill, or "BCRA") has since denied to national political parties, federal candidates, and federal officeholders. And what the Republican National Committee used to do with such soft money, but could no longer, the unofficial Americans for a Better Country now planned to do instead. ABC would finance a variety of ostensibly *indirect* campaign activities—"issue ads" and "generic" voter mobilization programs that avoided blatant "express advocacy" messages ("Vote for Bush") and substituted wink-and-nod appeals in their place ("Call President Bush and tell him how wonderful you think he is"). In other words, ABC intended to use huge, unregulated pots of cash—deposited in separate, "nonfederal" bank accounts that *weren't* registered with the FEC—to produce the same, "sham" electioneering appeals that campaign finance reformers had hoped to make illegal.

Can we do that, ABC asked the FEC last November? How much soft money does the new law allow us to raise and spend on behalf of the Bush reelection campaign?

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To make a long story short, the FEC's February 18 answer was: *Not very much.*

3 Why should the commission's less than accommodating response to a Bush-friendly group of Republicans pose problems for the Democratic party? Because most Republican operatives, including the ones who sought last month's FEC ruling, would be perfectly content to raise and spend no soft money at all this year—provided, that is, they could be confident that their Democratic counterparts weren't raising or spending any, either.

By restricting soft money fundraising, McCain-Feingold has magnified the importance of an existing Republican advantage in still-legal "hard money" donations. The GOP had a much larger base of small-dollar individual contributors to begin with, and its lead appears to be expanding. Democratic party officials have managed to find 600,000 first-time donors since BCRA took effect—which is pretty good, except that the comparable Republican figure is a million. What's more, by raising hard-money contribution limits, BCRA made those extra 400,000 GOP supporters a good deal more valuable than they would have been four years ago; each of them is now allowed to write a bigger check. All of which helps explain why it was such an easy decision for President Bush to turn down close to $19 million in free federal matching funds (and the expenditure limits that come with those funds) for his uncontested primary campaign this year. Exclusively by tapping individual, private contributors, Bush has been able to raise a record $150 million (and counting), triple the amount he'd otherwise have been allowed to spend before being formally awarded his second presidential nomination.

Democratic insiders have long foreseen and worried over a scenario like this: March 2004 would roll around and the president would be sitting on a giant stack of cash. Their own party's nominee, by contrast, would just be emerging from a series of contested primaries, and his bank account would be close to empty. Worse, if he'd accepted federal matching funds, the Democratic standard-bearer might already be running up against the $44.6 million preconvention spending limit that participants in the public financing system are required to observe—forcing his campaign to lie largely dormant, and defenseless, until the end of July.

The fear, in short, was that President Bush would be free to pound away at his rival with television commercials all through the spring and summer, much the way President Clinton ran devastating "issue ads" against Bob Dole in 1996, paying for them mostly with soft money from the Democratic National Committee—a rule-bending scheme that caught Republicans flatfooted. This time, though, the Bush PR blitz would be a hard-money-only affair, entirely on the up and up. And under McCain-Feingold, there'd be no DNC soft money accounts to which the Democratic nominee could go running for help. Somebody would have to figure out another way to prop him up.

So in the late spring and early summer of 2003, a small group of Democratic campaign hands, labor-movement representatives, and left-leaning interest-group activists formulated plans for a roughly $300 million voter-mobilization and ad campaign targeting President Bush for defeat this fall. The project would be administered through a variety of groups specifically created for that purpose—all of them organized as "nonconnected" political associations under Section 527 of the tax code. And because each of these so-called 527s disclaimed any formal relationship with the Democratic party, they were effectively beyond reach of McCain-Feingold's soft money prohibitions, and entitled to fund the bulk of that $300 million budget with the big-dollar donations the party itself had been forced to give up. Or so the leaders of these groups supposed.

Then last September, three prominent Washington Republicans registered a 527 of their own with the IRS: the aforementioned Americans for a Better Country. And two months after that—not having done much else in the meantime—ABC sent its "advisory opinion request" to the FEC. Most observers don't believe ABC ever really intended to pursue the extensive agenda of broadcast and grassroots pro-Bush activity outlined in that query letter. Most observers think, instead, that ABC's sole ambition was to secure a public regulatory pronouncement from the commission about the legality of such a program: Can a Republican 527 raise and spend soft money in support of George W. Bush *exactly the way those Democratic 527s are raising and spending soft money against him?* Most observers suspect that ABC always wanted the FEC to say "no way."

4 These Democratic 527 groups you speak of—they're the people financier George Soros has been giving money to, aren't they? Yes. The Democratic plan got under way in earnest during a meeting of strategists convened last summer at the eccentric multibillionaire's Southampton, Long Island, beach house. Two of the attendees, Steve Rosenthal, former political director of the AFL-CIO, and Ellen Malcolm, longtime president of Emily's List, had just cofounded something called America Coming Together (ACT), an organization through which they hoped to direct "a massive voter contact program . . . to defeat George W. Bush." Soros rather liked this idea, seeing as how—he would later tell a *Washington Post* reporter—Bush's defeat had developed into "the central focus of my life." So Soros pulled Rosenthal and Malcolm aside, away from the other guests, told them he'd like to get in on their ACT, and promised to give the group $10 mil-

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lion, just like that. At least half this pledge has since been fulfilled.

Not coincidentally, ACT remains the richest and best known of the new anti-Bush 527s. But there are a handful of similar enterprises so closely affiliated that—except on paper—it's difficult to determine where one of them ends and the next begins. Down the hall from ACT, on the same floor of the same Washington office building, is another Soros-supported 527 called the Media Fund, which will produce and purchase all the television ads. Raising additional money for use by both ACT and the Media Fund is a third 527, Joint Victory Campaign 2004. ACT's CEO Rosenthal and Service Employees union president Andy Stern, who serves on ACT's executive committee, are also executive director and board chairman, respectively, of still another 527 called Partnership for America's Families. The Partnership plans a voter registration drive focused on union households, women, and "communities of color"—whom it will "inform and engage" about the "disastrous impact" of "failed Bush administration policies." And ACT executive Cecile Richards, previously a top aide to House minority leader Nancy Pelosi, is doing double duty as president of America Votes, a 527 whose job it is to ensure that a long list of cooperating nonprofit groups traditionally friendly to the Democratic party—Planned Parenthood, the NEA, the Sierra Club, People for the American Way, the trial lawyers, and so forth—don't work at cross purposes with ACT and its satellites.

It's a vast left-wing conspiracy, you might say.

5 So the FEC was being asked to take sides in a purely partisan argument, is that it? Democrats are the pro-527 faction, and Republicans are their enemies? More or less. But it hasn't always been that way. By itself, Section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code is no big deal. It's the provision in federal law that grants tax-free status to any organization "operated primarily for the purpose" of exercising "influence" over elections and appointments to "Federal, State, or local public office." All federal political committees registered with the FEC and subject to the laws it regulates—including the national committees of both major parties—are also 527s.

But the reverse isn't true; not all 527s need be FEC-registered political committees. Some steer clear of federal elections, restricting their attention to state and local politics—subject, therefore, only to state and local campaign laws. Other 527s do concern themselves with federal elections, but avoid any hint of (or successfully disguise) a partisan interest in the outcomes. You've got to make at least $1,000 worth of "expenditures" for or against a federal candidate before the FEC will trouble itself with how you obtained the money—from whom and in what amounts.

With a second category of 527s, the question whether some outflowing dollop of cash constitutes an "expenditure" has been rendered moot by McCain-Feingold. These are unambiguously partisan organizations, most notably the Democratic and Republican national committees, whose work the law now assumes to be *exclusively* directed toward the support or opposition of federal candidates. The party committees may not solicit, receive, spend, fold, spindle, or mutilate a single dollar of soft money. Their every bank account must be registered with, and exhaustively disclosed to, the FEC.

For a third category of 527s, however, the definition of "expenditure" is fraught with significance. These are the groups like America Coming Together—and Americans for a Better Country, ACT's mischievous doppelgänger—who freely concede their intention to spill a good bit of change on the public promotion of particular candidates for federal office. So they go to the commission, and register themselves as political committees, and pledge, in that capacity, to obey strict hard-money diets. At the same time, though, these groups have plans for a wide variety of additional undertakings: some plainly partisan but not strictly federal ("Vote Democratic!"); some, indeed, whose true partisan character may never be articulated (demographically targeted voter registration initiatives, for example). Which of these activities has a federal "purpose" requiring that they be paid for, in whole or part, by the "expenditure" of federally regulated contributions? And which, instead, may be paid for with a single, seven-figure, soft money George Soros gift?

That's where the controversy comes in.

It used to be the rule, inferred from a footnote in the Supreme Court's 1976 *Buckley* decision, that only "express advocacy," the baldest possible kind of direct electioneering activity ("Vote for Bush!"), was regulated. So it used to be the case that there'd be clearly partisan 527 organizations, who were clearly involving themselves in federal elections, clearly spending lots more than $1,000 in the process, and clearly doing so with particular ballot results in mind—but they never spoke the "magic words" of express advocacy, and thus could claim never to have made an "expenditure." Which excused them from registration with the FEC as a "political committee." Which meant they didn't have to abide by the financial restrictions attached to that designation. Which is another way of saying: They could gorge themselves on all the soft money they wanted.

Not so many years ago, the most notorious such 527 project was run by a man named Newt Gingrich. It was called GOPAC. Most Republicans defended the practice (and soft money generally) on free speech grounds. Almost everyone in the Democratic party, on the other hand, railed against GOPAC-like 527 schemes (and soft money

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generally) as a species of political corruption. And those were the positions both parties maintained right up through the congressional enactment of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform in 2002.

Since then, the Supreme Court has (a) dramatically reinterpreted its 27-year-old "express advocacy" footnote; and (b) included with that reinterpretation a crucial, brand-new footnote the obscurity of which we will no doubt be debating for another 27 years; while (c) upholding McCain-Feingold's prohibitions on soft money fundraising by the national political committees. So all of a sudden, Newt Gingrich is forgotten, Democratic GOPACs are popping up all over, and it's Republicans who are decrying the 527s as an unconscionable "loophole," demanding that something be done. Republican House Administration Committee chairman Bob Ney of Ohio has held investigative hearings into the activities of ACT and its allies, complete with threatened subpoenas. Republican Senate Rules Committee chairman Trent Lott is promising to follow suit. Meanwhile, Democrats have rediscovered the First Amendment and the value of big-boned (and well-financed) debate on issues of great public moment. On February 10, Nancy Pelosi and 57 other House Democrats signed a letter urging the FEC to proceed cautiously, if at all, on new regulation of 527s. When they were voting "aye" on campaign finance reform, Pelosi and her colleagues never dreamed it would come to *this*: "In fact, it was our hope that BCRA would reinvigorate grassroots organizations" (funded by ordinary grassroots billionaires, presumably) "to participate in the political process." On February 12, a group of Senate Democrats rounded up by minority leader Tom Daschle sent the FEC a nearly identical petition.

God bless America.

6 What about the campaign finance reform lobby? Surely, having worked for years to put the major-party soft money machines out of business, the reformers don't want to see a private, even less accountable version of that system recreated by a couple dozen rich guys like George Soros. Surely the reform folks are lining up with Republicans on this one, no? Surely you jest. The largest and most influential campaign finance reform outfits, forced to choose between the logic of their own past arguments, on the one hand, and the logic of the Democratic party's near-term electoral prospects, on the other . . . well, there's little evidence these groups have spent much time struggling with their consciences, let's put it that way. They've thrown in with the Democrats, abandoning—even directly repudiating—views on soft money and 527s to which many of them have been firmly committed for years.

Take Common Cause, for instance, the group probably most associated in the public mind with campaign finance reform. In May 2000, Common Cause president Scott Harshbarger wrote the FEC to warn that any further proliferation of 527 political committees would augur an "accelerating collapse of the federal election laws." To forestall such a disaster, Harshbarger recommended that the FEC require any and all 527s that solicit money in connection with a federal election "to register and report" to the commission as regular, hard-money-only political committees. Even today, Common Cause still has posted on its website a full-length report condemning the existence of soft money 527s as an "attack on our nation's elections," and an illegitimate "evasion" of federal laws governing campaign contributions.

And yet on February 17, 2004, the day before the FEC was due to rule on the Americans for a Better Country advisory opinion request, Common Cause faxed the commission an urgent plea that it not too hastily ignore "the free speech rights of individuals to come together in voluntary organizations to raise their voices" in the political arena. Though it had been perfectly clear to Common Cause before, it was somehow no longer clear at all "that 527 political committees offer the same opportunities for corruption . . . that soft money donations to political parties demonstrably did." Nor, for that matter, "have we yet witnessed 527s playing an anti-democratic role in the political process, such as by giving the interests of wealthy donors greater influence than those of other citizens." George Soros? Never heard of him.

Cosigning the Common Cause letter, incidentally, was NYU Law School's Brennan Center for Justice. The Brennan Center's most recent previous communication to the FEC on the question of 527 groups had come just about this time three years ago. In those days, even before enactment of McCain-Feingold's new fundraising and election-advocacy limits, Brennan was of the view that most 527 soft money activity was *already* illegal. "Unless they engage only in de minimus federal political activities," Brennan advised the commission, *all* 527s should automatically be considered regular political committees—and thus be prohibited from soliciting or accepting soft money contributions. Other groups might escape regulation by avoiding "express advocacy." But 527s "are not entitled to the benefit."

7 Has *anyone* in this controversy acted honorably, or at least taken a position that isn't hypocritical? Sure. John McCain favored a broad-scale regulatory crackdown on soft money in federal elections before. And he favors it now: "The recent creation of certain new organizations under Section 527" represents, he says, a "blatant end run around the campaign finance laws [that] should

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not be tolerated." Three smaller campaign finance advocacy groups also stuck by their philosophical guns last month: Democracy 21, the Campaign Legal Center, and the Center for Responsive Politics all urged the FEC to confront politically active 527s with the most rigorous possible regulatory pressure, else already operational Democratic schemes like ACT—and theoretical Republican schemes like ABC—would soon be committing "massive violations of the law." On the opposite side of the partisan equation, a tiny group of conservative nonprofits like the National Right to Life Committee, just as they did to Congress during the larger battle over McCain-Feingold, has now insisted to the FEC that Planned Parenthood's right to affiliate itself with soft money efforts to unseat a pro-life president . . . well, even *that* is protected by the First Amendment.

And then there's the Federal Election Commission itself, the agency that everybody's always loved to hate. The FEC's career staff lawyers, long reviled by reformers for allegedly lax enforcement of the campaign laws, labored for months to produce a draft response to the ABC advisory opinion request. What they came up with should have delighted their former critics, but horrified most of them instead, which under the circumstances is all the more impressive: The document was extraordinarily tough. Nothing that ABC suggested it might wish to do could legally be funded from soft money bank accounts alone, the FEC general counsel's office concluded. Which meant that most of what the Soros/Rosenthal/Malcolm crowd are planning to do is out of bounds. As a matter of fact, if the FEC staff's reading of things is correct, it's hard to see how ACT and Soros haven't *already* broken the law. But we'll come back to that in a moment.

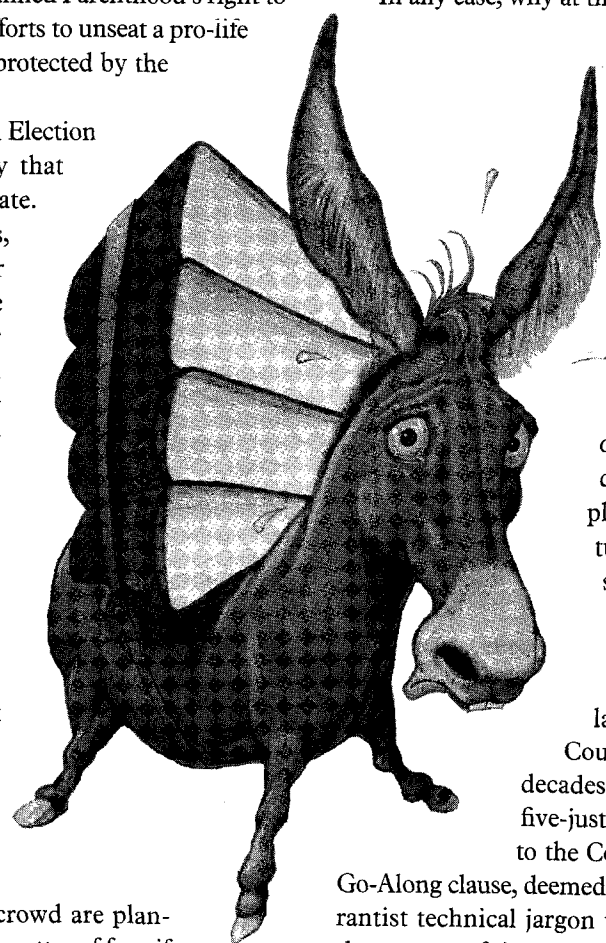

Illustration by Ismael Roldan

The FEC's current Republican chairman, legal scholar Bradley Smith, forcefully demurred from this view. Smith, too, has traditionally occupied a bogeyman's role in campaign-reform cosmology. He was supposed to be a rabid dogmatist about unfettered political speech, so rigidly resistant to new constraints on election activity as to be "unfit" for appointment to the FEC, where he would constantly be called upon, but couldn't be trusted, to enforce such constraints. That was the smear, anyway, emanating from the Brennan Center types when Smith's name was first put up for his present post, back in 1999.

Last month—in the matter of soft money raised and spent by nonparty political organizations whose publicly stated, primary purpose is to alter the outcome of a federal campaign—Bradley Smith did indeed prove resistant to new constraints on election activity. And the Brennan Center types, who have no shame, were rhapsodic in their praise. "Brad Smith has shown he is a man of principle," gushed Common Cause research director Celia Wexler. Some of us never doubted it, actually.

In any case, why at this point should anyone think that some quirk of ideology is what causes Bradley Smith to hesitate over handcuffing the 527s? Nowadays, isn't it possible that even an expert like Smith must sometimes hesitate over such matters just because it's all begun to sound like Greek? Federal campaign law is a freakish mess—a 1974 omnibus statute, gutted and rendered only semi-coherent by the *Buckley* decision in 1976; the scars then plastered over with a quarter-century's worth of regulatory microscopia and equally gnostic judicial edicts; next, McCain-Feingold, a second omnibus statute barnacled onto the first; and, finally, last year's "landmark" Supreme Court look-back at the whole, decades-long lost weekend. In which a five-justice majority, by unspoken appeal to the Constitution's Make-It-Up-As-You-Go-Along clause, deemed it acceptable for a forest of obscurantist technical jargon to govern what thoughts this or that group of American citizens may or may not voice about their politics, during which months of an election year. And where. And with how many dollars.

Could be Bradley Smith wasn't feeling at all this grumpy at the FEC's meeting on February 18. It doesn't matter; his was the undogmatic, nonideological argument for cautious regulatory restraint in the face of legal uncertainty. The draft response the commission's staff had produced hamstringing 527s was a "plausible" reading of the statutes and precedents, he allowed. It was true that the Supreme Court had finally washed its hands of that famous footnote from 1976: "Express advocacy" was no longer an

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absolute boundary for congressional regulation of campaign activity. With few exceptions, nobody is guaranteed an "unlimited" right to influence the results of a federal election—or a right to use unlimited amounts of money in the attempt.

But in the absence of an explicit congressional directive to the contrary, Smith thought it unwise for the commission to *debar* anyone from such activity, either. And since no such explicit prohibition concerning the soft money bank accounts maintained by FEC-registered political committees can be found anywhere in the text of McCain-Feingold, maybe it was best, he concluded, for the commission to tread lightly here, however "plausible" and well meaning heavier and more ambitious steps might be.

In their precise details, the more modest moves Smith would have preferred the commission take need not divert us here, for he lost the argument. Suffice it to say that Bradley Smith, as did one of the other Republican FEC commissioners, cast an honorable vote against the interests of his own party.

8 I'm relieved you said that about the "precise details"; my head started hurting two pages ago. What's the bottom line on the Soros people and the $300 million they want to spend against President Bush? News accounts have largely obscured that bottom line. The final vote on February 18 was 4 to 2 for what's generally been described as a "compromise" between the clampdown recommended by the FEC's staff and the relatively laissez-faire alternative proposed by Bradley Smith. There was no such compromise, really. In the end, the FEC's third Republican commissioner, joined by all three of his Democratic counterparts (who were voting against the interests of *their* party, it bears pointing out), embraced the entire, essential substance of the staff's first draft. The commissioners' only apparent changes were cosmetic editorial adjustments apparently intended to render the text less daunting for native English speakers. It was nice of them to try.

Translated into the quasi-vernacular:

¶ All public communications that "promote," "support," "attack," or "oppose" any clearly identified candidate for federal office—say, for example, George W. Bush—whether or not the damn things "expressly advocate" his defeat, and no matter when they're made during the political calendar, must be paid for with hard dollars only. No money from labor unions or corporations. And no checks for more than $5,000 from a billionaire. Who may only write one such check to America Coming Together for this purpose each year. The other $9,995,000 that billionaire has offered ACT are useless here.

¶ If such a communication as described above should happen to mention, in addition to the dastardly George W. Bush, some clearly identified candidate for nonfederal office, too—or should it merely add a nasty swipe at "Republicans" generally—well, sorry, that'll only get you so far. Somewhere between half and three-quarters of the cost will *still* have to come from your hard-money accounts.

¶ Same goes for voter-registration and get-out-the-vote initiatives. (Incidentally, judging from their most recent FEC and IRS disclosure filings, ACT and the other anti-Bush 527s haven't got *any* hard money to speak of at the moment. They'll have to go raise it from scratch, competing for donors directly with the Democratic national party committees—and with the Democratic party's presumptive presidential nominee. Neither those committees nor that nominee will be happy about it.)

¶ Oh, almost forgot. Only federally regulated contributions—in amounts no larger than $5,000 per donor, per year—may be requested in fundraising appeals that mention specific candidates for federal office "in a manner that conveys" an intention to use the money in support or opposition to those candidates. So you know how when you guys were up in Southampton last summer, and you were talking to Mr. Soros about what you wanted to do to defeat George Bush, and he told you he wanted to give you $10 million? It looks like when you started taking that money, it might have been illegal. And though the commission declines to get into such a hypothetical, it looks like Soros's *giving* you the money might have been illegal, too. The relevant criminal penalties are outlined in Title 2 of the U.S. Code: "Any person who knowingly and willfully commits a violation of any provision of this Act which involves the making, receiving, or reporting of any contribution, donation or expenditure . . . aggregating $25,000 or more during a calendar year shall be fined under Title 18, United States Code, or imprisoned for not more than 5 years, or both." There's probably wiggle room in that "knowingly and willfully" part. Good luck.

¶ Also, you know how, right at this very moment, on the America Coming Together website, there's that section labeled "Donate," which offers a person the chance to respond, "Yes, I am committed to kicking George W. Bush out of the White House"? And then there are some instructions about how to send in money? And then way at the bottom, in smaller type, there's a notice that indicates how contributions in excess of $5,000 per year "will be placed in the America Coming Together non-federal account"? Whaddya think? Maybe that's illegal, too? See above.

Anyone inclined to file an FEC complaint against America Coming Together on the basis of the commission's February 18 advisory opinion would thus seem possessed of a fairly strong case for enforcement action. And while it's true that certain of ACT's closest allies in the anti-Bush 527

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orbit (the Media Fund, for example) will claim to fall outside the scope of this advisory opinion—on the basis of their own failure to have registered with the FEC as political committees—it's just as true that the commission will be attempting to resolve that pesky detail in a formal rulemaking procedure due to begin in a matter of weeks. Here the question will be: What constitutes a "political committee" subject to the hard-money contribution and expenditure requirements of federal election law, with special attention to the status of currently unregistered 527 political organizations.

It is difficult to imagine how the commission could fail to conclude that an outfit like the Media Fund has the same "major purpose" as ACT—with whom the fund is joined at the hip, and from whom it is otherwise indistinguishable, as both organizations routinely admit. And should the commission indeed draw such a conclusion, then the Media Fund and all the others would immediately become subject to the full reach of federal election law: None would be permitted to accept more than $5,000 per year from George Soros for use against George W. Bush. And under separate but related provisions of the law, Soros would be prohibited from contributing more than a total $37,500 for that purpose—to all the 527s put together, during the whole, biennial 2003-2004 election cycle.

That $300 million would appear to be evaporating awfully fast.

9 What's the bottom line on the the whole election, then? Are you saying Bush is a lock? C'mon: Only an idiot would say something like that. If "things are bad" and they're in the mood, the voters are going to "send Bush back to Texas," as the saying goes, no matter how much money gets squirreled into anybody's bank accounts. And if the reverse is true, yes, Bush is going to win, but campaign fundraising won't have made the difference.

But what if, to a significant chunk of the electorate, things seem neither especially good *nor* especially bad? What if the election is therefore a close one, as it was last time? And what if, in a close election, money really can make the difference—a postulate, after all, on which much of American politics has based itself since at least the time when Karl Rove's hero, Mark Hanna, was managing the fortunes of William McKinley?

In that case, it looks like Bush really will be a lock. Unless the Democratic party—and fast—can figure out a way around the no-soft-money boulder that's been placed in its path by the campaign finance reform law. For which Democrats have only themselves, principally, to blame. Raising soft money outside the party apparatus no longer seems feasible. Indeed, it may never have been feasible, even if the legal and regulatory obstacles the anti-Bush 527s now appear to confront at the FEC had never emerged. According to their most recent public disclosures, the eight most important Democratic 527s had raised only $27.6 million by the end of December. The Media Fund, with an announced budget of $95 million, was still $92 million short of that goal.

There are intelligent and experienced political observers who'll tilt at conventional wisdom and tell you the McCain-Feingold experiment has proved healthy for the Democratic party. John Harwood of the *Wall Street Journal* has recently written up a particularly subtle version of the argument. The Brookings Institution's Tom Mann has recently been quoted endorsing Harwood's theory on UCLA Law School professor Rick Hasen's invaluable website, *electionlawblog.org*. The Democratic party is "thriving in a McCain-Feingold world," Mann says, "a case largely unaddressed in press coverage." Democrats "got lazy going after soft dollars in large denominations." Now the new law "has forced their hand." And, lookit: "The Democratic presidential candidates have raised collectively as much money as Bush has. The Democratic party committees are doing very well in their hard-money fundraising and especially with 'cash-on-hand.'"

As I say, these men are intelligent and experienced, and the argument is subtle. Too subtle, really. The Democratic party committees may be doing very well with their fundraising, but the Republican committees are doing better. Each of the GOP committees raised more than twice the money its Democratic counterpart did during January. Together, at the beginning of February, the Republican committees had almost three times as much cash on hand. Yes, the Democratic presidential candidates have collectively raised as much as Bush—*more*, actually: just over $178 million for the 10 Democrats to just under $147 million for the lone Republican. But so what? *All of that Democratic money has been spent already*. Toting up the cash-on-hand figures in the final reports of those candidates who've dropped out and the latest available reports of those few who are still in, you get $13.4 million. From which, for a fully accurate perspective, one must subtract $17.3 million in standing debt. Which leaves the Democratic candidates $3.9 million in the collective hole.

John Edwards, who theoretically retains some hope of securing his party's nomination, has a net current campaign war chest of barely $100,000. John Kerry, who's highly likely to secure the nomination, has a net current campaign war chest of negative $5 million. George W. Bush, on the other hand, has more than $100 million to play around with over the next five months.

"We will never catch up," Kerry spokesman Michael Meehan told the *Washington Post* on February 22. Meehan's right. The soft money's gone. The party may be over. ♦

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Going Soft on Iran

The temptation of America's foreign policy "realists"

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

According to the newspapers and the CIA, Iranian "hard-liners" dealt their country's reform movement and fledgling democracy a heavy, perhaps lethal, blow on February 20. With over 2,000 candidates "disqualified" before the parliamentary elections even took place, the ruling clerical elite ensured that the reformers, who've won office and national attention since the presidential election of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997, would no longer dominate the parliament, or Majles, which has become a forum for public discontent and frustration with the ruling mullahs. With a majority of seats in the next parliament, and already firmly in control of the country's internal security organizations and courts, the "hard-liners" will be able to fracture and silence, so the reporting goes, the political parties, newspapers, and organizations that left-wing clerics, like Khatami, had used to create a national movement for change.

According to many American "realists"—the school of foreign policy most often associated with such men as former national security advisers Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski, former diplomats James Baker, Richard Murphy, Thomas Pickering, and Richard Haass, and institutions like the Nixon Center and the Council on Foreign Relations—there may be a silver lining in the bad news. Iran's "hard-liners" may in fact be "pragmatic conservatives," to borrow a phrase often heard now in the colloquies of Washington's think tanks where the intellectual laborers of American realism are trying to devise a new strategy for Iran and the Greater Middle East. In the post-9/11 world, the fear of weapons of mass destruction in the wrong hands dominates public policy debates, and a growing number of American realists believe that Iran's "pragmatic mullahs"—in Persian translation, this means former Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the major-domo of the clerical establishment, and Ali Khamenei, the "spiritual leader" of the country—are the men to cut a deal to halt Iran's WMD programs.

There is even a sense in certain quarters that we might actually be lucky that Khatami and the parliamentary reformers have been whipped. Rafsanjani and Khamenei may play a very rough game domestically—Hezbollah thugs beat dissidents, "rogue" intelligence agents knife and run down liberal intellectuals, the judiciary jails any dangerous political opposition figure too prominent to off, and the Council of Guardians preemptively disqualifies troublemakers from office—but externally they are, so the theory goes, responsible, rational actors who are principally motivated by geopolitics and economics (and, in the case of Rafsanjani, lucre). They are, in other words, real men, not distracted by all the leftist intellectual debates that consumed so many on the Khatami side of the political house.

It's worthwhile to remember that not that long ago prominent American realists made a different argument. In May 2001, just before President Khatami won his second term, Brent Scowcroft wrote in the *Washington Post* that we should unilaterally engage the Islamic Republic by lifting sanctions—specifically those targeted against the energy sector—even before talking about the clerical regime's fondness for terrorism, its development of nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction, or its unrelenting hostility to a peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians. According to Scowcroft, such a unilateral move was not to be viewed as "a sign of weakness in light of continued predations by an obnoxious and repressive regime." Such a charge would "miss the central point, which is that an active struggle is underway to determine the future course of Iran. The key is to speak to the people of Iran, not to their oppressors." Thus, for the Bush administration to give "a signal from

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the United States showing the desire for a better bilateral relationship might provide encouragement and impetus to reformers and the people who so eagerly seek change."

Of course, Scowcroft didn't explain how exactly an oil deal with Conoco or ExxonMobil would empower Iran's democratic forces. (One wonders whether Scowcroft, who has been a paid consultant to U.S. energy companies, would have made this argument to the shah of Iran, or whether American oil executives have ever made this case to the energy-rich princes and dictators of the Middle East, post-Soviet Central Asia, or the Caucasus.) Neither he nor the other heavy hitters who co-chaired a major review of U.S.-Iran policy in 2001 (former secretary of defense James Schlesinger and Democratic congressman Lee Hamilton) explained why Rafsanjani and Khamenei, two clerics who have excelled at *machtpolitik*, would not view unilateral American concessions as unilateral American concessions.

Needless to say, the realist case has evolved with events, and now it is time for the United States to engage "an obnoxious and repressive regime" since Iran's nuclear program, which is much more advanced than we'd guessed, gives us no choice. Thomas Pickering, the perennial ambassador and former undersecretary of state for political affairs, has also underscored Iran's "capacity for making life uncomfortable and messy for the United States and its allies in Iraq" as a reason to seek a modus vivendi with Tehran's clerical overlords.

From the realists' perspective, the reformers had their day, they lost, and now America must deal with the facts on the ground. And, fortunately, Iran's rulers are corrupt divines who no longer believe in their hearts they have a mandate from heaven. First and foremost, they want to stay in power, within secure borders, unthreatened by the United States, Israel, or its neighbors, recognized as a legitimate regional power with accepted interests in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. If we let them be a member of the club, if we make Rafsanjani and Khamenei feel safe, in their own country and in others', then they might give up the bomb.

This realist American diplomacy would be complemented by the efforts of the British, French, and Germans—the "E.U. three" who are responsible for the European Union's Iranian relations. Simultaneously, the Europeans would suggest to Tehran that they might bring the Islamic Republic before the United Nations Security Council for censure for its nuclear prevarications. And if the Iranians continue to misbehave, the Europeans would hint with increasing frankness the possibility of economic sanctions against Tehran—the type of sanctions that American realists want first to lift as a carrot to induce better clerical behavior.

Though not known for using economic sanctions as political tools—Paris just announced a $2 billion oil exploration deal with the Islamic Republic even though its diplomats and spooks have long known that the clerical regime has been blatantly lying to the International Atomic Energy Agency about its nuclear "research" program—the Europeans will, this time, so the theory goes, get serious. After all, they, too, dread the spread of nuclear weapons. They, too, view the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a cornerstone of the liberal internationalist order. Perhaps most of all, they wouldn't want George Bush untethered from adult European supervision, possibly inclined to bomb Iran to keep Rafsanjani and Khamenei from getting a nuclear weapon.

Of course, none of the above makes much sense. Not the understanding of what happened in Iran on February 20. Not the realist position on the ruling clerical elite. Not the likelihood of effective joint action between the Americans and the Europeans. What does make sense, however, is the coming realist assault on President Bush's post-9/11 foreign policy. The realist temptation in the American foreign-policy establishment is always powerful, principally because it is the path of least resistance and least action, and it dovetails nicely with the status-quo reflexes of the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the military brass at the Pentagon. Senator John Kerry appears to have embraced the realist cause.

But if the Bush administration opts for a variation of the realist approach to Iran—and fatigue from rebuilding Iraq certainly reinforces the administration's hitherto pronounced preference to avoid gaming out worst-case contingency plans for dealing with Iran's nuclear weapons programs or the clerical regime's "detention" of senior members of Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda—it will gut what is left of its post-9/11 "axis of evil" doctrine. It will effectively deny the primary transcendent lesson that President Bush has drawn from 9/11: that the Middle East is politically dysfunctional, that U.S.-backed tyranny in Muslim lands was an essential element in the development of the holy-warriorism of al Qaeda, and that the spread of democracy in the Muslim Middle East remains the only cure for the sacred terror of 9/11.

American realists want none of this. Even after 9/11, they don't really want to be involved in other people's "internal affairs." By nature, they hate Promethean missions. They don't like for America's transatlantic relations—and most realists are pretty devout transatlanticists—to be roiled by a terrorist threat so defined that it mandates a doctrine of preemption. Ideological combat

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is always an ugly, unmanageable affair, which is why many realists tried so hard to read ideology out of the Cold War. If the Bush administration is serious about transforming the Muslim Middle East—and the jury is still out on whether it is—it will inevitably unsettle, if not alienate, every single "pro-American" king, emir, and dictator in the region.

The issue of weapons of mass destruction is thus an ideal wedge for the realist camp. If Libya can become, as the British Foreign Office is obviously hoping, the template for approaching the rulers of the Middle East—that is, if stopping WMD trumps spreading democracy—then the realists have an excellent chance of stifling the Bush administration's post-9/11 rhetoric. President Bush's pro-democracy speeches have been driving U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. They have been driving the efforts, feeble though they may be, by the rulers of the Middle East to open their political systems. The national dialogues of Saudi Arabia's Prince Abdullah are a direct result of President Bush's words and actions (the invasion of Iraq and the inevitable empowerment of Iraq's Shiites certainly encouraged Prince Abdullah to have his first dialogue about Saudi Arabia's oppressed Shiites, who happen to live on top of Saudi Arabia's oil in the Eastern Province). Silence those Reaganite speeches, and the foreign affairs bureaucracies will take over.

Then Bush II could start looking like Bush I a lot faster than Brent Scowcroft or Zbigniew Brzezinski has ever dreamed. Because Iran's nuclear weapons program is so damnably hard to delay without preemptive American or Israeli airstrikes, and the Bush administration remains understandably loath to contemplate military action against another Middle Eastern state, the realists within the administration and without could lock the White House into exploring some kind of dialogue with Rafsanjani and Khamenei, who would, of course, approve of any American effort to lift unilaterally economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic. (They know, even if the realists do not, that these sanctions have seriously cramped Iran.)

There is a big hurdle coming up for those who want to believe (or to pretend to believe) that diplomacy offers a solution to Iran's WMD aspirations. The International Atomic Energy Agency must issue another report on Iran's compliance in June—the same time the Bush administration is supposed to release its Greater Middle East Initiative, which will show how serious the administration is about pushing democracy in a region where the leaders hate it. It has become obvious to all concerned that the Iranians have been willfully trying to deceive IAEA officials and the European diplomats who are responsible for maintaining the WMD dialogue with the clerical regime. European officials, including the French, don't bother even in private to deny Iran's nuclear weapons objectives, its continuing deceit, and the difficulty they are going to have in verifying Iranian compliance.

The clerical regime has yet to sign the more intrusive protocol to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, despite its promise to do so. (The Europeans, of course, have not yet seriously threatened the clerics with any penalty for their failure to sign.) Hassan Rohani, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council—a long-time bastion of power for Rafsanjani—recently declared, in one of those delightful and not infrequent moments when Iranian hubris betrays the revolutionary clergy's bent for mendacity and deception, that the Iranian use of polonium, an element applicable in both power-generation and weapons, and P2 centrifuges, which are designed for enriching uranium, "is not the only research we are doing. . . . We have other projects which we have not declared to the IAEA and we see no need to do so." It is very likely that the Europeans, including the British, will be able to walk round Rohani's prevarications.

Anyone who has dealt with the Europeans involved in this process, particularly the French, knows that the odds of Paris agreeing to threaten Tehran with sanctions that would truly hurt—for example, an oil embargo—are virtually nil. In all probability, nuclear proliferation in Iran, or elsewhere, will not prove to be an issue where Western Europeans can collectively agree to use force. Ethically they are simply operating, as Robert Kagan has very politely pointed out, in a different realm. And as the Nixon Center's Geoffrey Kemp has remarked, "the Europeans have to play their part" for a realist foreign policy to be credible. However, the Bush administration is hoping to punt this problem down the road, at least until after the November elections. The Europeans will have at least one more chance to devise "imaginative diplomacy" to dismantle Iran's nuclear weapons program without threatening the use of force.

But the Europeans won't be the only ones working against the Americans who desperately want to find a "credible" diplomatic process for dealing with Iran's quest for nuclear arms. The Iranians are very unlikely to play the roles realists envision for them. Rafsanjani and Khamenei may well be "pragmatic" mullahs—I have certainly long argued that they are. But they have also been among the godfathers of Iranian terrorism. From Beirut to Buenos Aires to Paris to Berlin and to the Khobar Towers barracks in Saudi Arabia, Rafsanjani and Khamenei put terrorism into the foreign policy lexicon of the Iranian clergy. When Iranian intelligence officials

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or their surrogates surveilled American diplomatic facilities and personnel around the world in the 1990s, it was on their orders. (Whatever these exercises were for, it is unlikely they were innocent in intent.)

These same gentlemen have, of course, always wanted to buy American. Conoco, ExxonMobil, Boeing, GE—it would be hard to find an American firm that Rafsanjani wouldn't welcome. It also beggars the imagination to believe that these two gentlemen don't control the fate of al Qaeda inside Iran. The Bush administration has chosen to play down the issue of al Qaeda in the Islamic Republic. The Pentagon and State Department remonstrated with the Iranians when they first realized that al Qaeda forces had fled into Iran after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. News leaks about worrisome intercepts surfaced. And then the subject disappeared until official leaks again surfaced in 2003 suggesting that al Qaeda was in Iran and had possibly plotted from there attacks into Saudi Arabia. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Republic again returned to the back burner.

This was a serious mistake. Regardless of whether al Qaeda members in Iran were operationally involved in terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, these individuals are among the most wanted men in American history. We have never had worse enemies, yet we did nothing when Iran prevaricated about whether they were in the country when we clearly knew they were. Remember, Rafsanjani and Khamenei are master chess players of power politics. If Americans don't rise in righteous indignation over the "detention" of possibly active al Qaeda members—and the key component of President Bush's Axis of Evil doctrine is that countries that harbor terrorists will be treated as terrorists—why shouldn't Rafsanjani and Khamenei, with their nuclear weapons, tempt America's wrath?

Khamenei and especially Rafsanjani have nurtured Iran's nuclear program from its infancy. More than anyone else, they are the will and mind behind this program. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that their very identity—who they are as leaders, clerics, and Muslims—is wrapped up in Iran's bomb program. And they are supposed to give it away to Americans, who don't threaten them over al Qaeda, and to Europeans, who keep offering the Iranians more time after the clergy has blatantly lied to them? If you were a "pragmatic" mullah who had beaten the shah, survived the American-aided legions of Saddam Hussein, and eaten alive your revolutionary colleagues-turned-enemies, would you be intimidated by such folks?

And the realists shouldn't count out the fallen clerical left in Iran. Neither the clerical left nor the vastly greater number of ordinary Iranians who are disgusted by the ruling clergy are likely to remain quiescent. They may not go into violent counterrevolution—the Iranians still remember the violence of the first revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, and many obviously hope that they can find some peaceful way to real democracy. But patience is not a well-known Iranian virtue. Sooner not later, the discontent will boil forth. Rafsanjani and Khamenei know that many Iranians have more backbone than Khatami. Iranian prisons are full of such men. The Special Clerical Court, where the regime discreetly intimidates dissident mullahs, remains a busy place. The left-wing clergy were right to believe that they were riding an unstoppable democratic wave in Iranian history. They were wrong to think that their erstwhile brethren, who cling more tightly to the notion that the nation will go to hell without an indomitable clerical vanguard, would simply roll over when confronted with devastating election results.

But the die is now cast. The anti-climactic nonelection on February 20 at least confirmed that. The clerical opposition that has more fire in its belly—and the numerous disciples of Grand Ayatollah Hosein Ali Montazeri, Iran's premier dissident cleric, certainly appear to be made of sterner stuff than Khatami—won't make the same mistake twice. Neither will the students and other young Iranian men of the streets who've grown disgusted with the regime.

The ideas of constitutional government and democracy have been driving Iranian political thought for a hundred years. Rafsanjani, if not Khamenei, is sufficiently educated to know that he is a product of this movement. More protests are inevitable. They will undoubtedly be enough to make it politically unacceptable, if not morally distasteful, for even the most true-blue American realist to deal with such "an obnoxious and repressive regime."

The realist vision of Iranian politics and U.S.-Iranian relations has zero chance of providing a solution to the WMD conundrum. The Bush administration needs to hang tough and be guided by the golden rule of Iranian clerical politics: Do unto them before they have a chance to do unto you. Give the Europeans a chance—several chances—to prove themselves serious. Let the French ruin the Non-Proliferation Treaty. And then decide whether you want Rafsanjani and Khamenei to have the bomb. In the end, only democracy in Iran will finally solve the nuclear and terrorist problems. Ditto for the rest of the Middle East. Whether the Bush administration understands this come June is, of course, a different matter. ♦

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Dark Deeds

The Mystery of Cornell Woolrich

By Jon L. Breen

Everett Collection

A European poster for Truffaut's The Bride Wore Black, *based on a Cornell Woolrich story.*

When I was twelve years old, I discovered Cornell Woolrich's "After-Dinner Story" in an old issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and Woolrich immediately joined the group of writers—Fredric Brown, Ray Bradbury, and Charles Beaumont were others—who so delighted my pre-adolescent heart that I have stockpiled and retained their books through all the years since. Approaching "After-Dinner Story" decades later, for the centennial last month of Woolrich's birth, I wondered if the story, originally in a 1938 issue of the classic pulp magazine *Black Mask*, would retain its initial impact.

It did, and it didn't. The elements that most gripped me at twelve were undoubtedly the action, the suspense, and the intriguing plot. An elevator in a Manhattan high-rise malfunctions and plunges to the ground, killing the operator and leaving the passengers in darkness. Some are injured, others not; some panic, while others keep their heads. After the rescue, it is discovered that one passenger was shot to death in the blackout, and the police conclude it had to be suicide. The father of the victim, certain it was murder, invites the survivors to a bizarre dinner party, telling them he knows who the murderer is; that he has poisoned that person's dinner; and that the covered dish brought last to the table contains the antidote, reaching for which (the father reasons) would constitute a confession.

Night and Fear
A Centenary Collection of Stories
by Cornell Woolrich
Carroll & Graf, 272 pp., $26

The suspense and narrative drive of this story held up fine in my long-delayed rereading, with harrowing descriptions of the accident, the rescue, and the heightening anxiety of the dinner guests. The plot, however, now seems wildly implausible, the surprise twist as predictable as it is contrived. Some of the prose suggested authorial haste: Woolrich, after all, was a pulp writer who was paid by the word and wrote fast. (With the single notable exception of Raymond Chandler, the great pulp writers seldom revised—it wasn't cost effective.)

On the other hand, "After-Dinner Story" includes character touches, social observations, and details of Depression-era New York that didn't mean much to me at twelve. Though Woolrich himself was a sad and maladjusted man who lived most of his life with his mother in residential hotels, he had an acute understanding of everyday people with ordinary jobs and aspirations. His stories rarely featured either the privileged or the lowest of

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the low, but rather those in the middle, generally decent and struggling to survive in a misanthropic world. MacKenzie, the protagonist of "After-Dinner Story," is a water-filter salesman, and one of his fellow passengers is more concerned with the breakage of the flashlight fountain pen he is trying to market than with his own safety. Although a homosexual (he once married, but it was a short-lived sham), Woolrich believably suggests the easy relationship of MacKenzie and his wife in a few passing references. The father-and-son bond is also economically evoked, and some of the other passengers come to life in minimal strokes. When MacKenzie exits the elevator unharmed, personal-injury lawyers are waiting to try to convince him of the value in being hurt.

Paramount Pictures

Jimmy Stewart and Grace Kelly in Hitchcock's Rear Window, *based on a Cornell Woolrich story.*

Woolrich is probably at his best in the short story form. "Dime a Dance," a 1938 *Black Mask* tale about a taxi dancer used as a decoy to trap a serial killer, also holds up well on rereading. Woolrich successfully writes from a first-person female viewpoint in this jazz-drenched, wickedly suspenseful tale that is one of the most frequently anthologized in crime fiction (sometimes under the inferior title "The Dancing Detective"). The decoy theme was recurrent in his work, and he also favored the vanishing-woman situation, developed in early short stories and used most notably in the novel *Phantom Lady* (1942), written under the pseudonym William Irish.

Born in New York in 1903, Woolrich was a child of divorce, spending some of his youth with his father in Mexico (an occasional locale of his fiction) and the rest with his mother in Manhattan. He quit Columbia University after launching his writing career as an ersatz F. Scott Fitzgerald in novels like *Cover Charge* (1926) and *Children of the Ritz* (1927). Woolrich wrote several effective novel-length works after discovering his crime-fiction métier in the mid-1930s. But the most famous of them, *The Bride Wore Black* (1940), points up his short story roots. It is episodic and schematic in structure: a chapter on the killer, a chapter on the victim, a chapter on the investigation, and then the cycle begins again. It was somewhat ahead of its time as a thriller about a determined cop's hunt for a female serial killer, whose motive gradually becomes known to the reader. Along the way, the novel offers inventive plotting, effective scenes, and well-realized characters—right up until an utterly preposterous, rabbit-out-of-a-hat windup.

Woolrich was so in tune with the film-noir school of the 1940s, that he became one of the most frequently adapted writers of crime fiction. His stories also were a perfect fit for the classic radio series *Suspense*, which began as a project of motion picture director Alfred Hitchcock, several years before his television stardom.

Woolrich and Hitchcock, whose names are often bracketed although they never worked together directly, had similar approaches and creative sensibilities. Hitchcock's great film *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) was based on a novel by Ethel Lina White, but it incorporated one of Woolrich's favorite nightmare situations. One of the director's greatest films, *Rear Window* (1954), was based on Woolrich's 1942 short story "It Had to Be Murder," to which Hitchcock added characters and incidents while keeping the basic situation and voyeuristic theme. What some believe to be Hitchcock's very best television mystery, "Four O'Clock" (1957), was based on Woolrich's "Three O'Clock" (1938). And when François Truffaut made a 1968 film in homage to his idol Hitchcock, he not only hired frequent Hitchcock collaborator Bernard Herrmann to compose the musical score, but chose Woolrich's *The Bride Wore Black* for adaptation.

Both Woolrich and Hitchcock were sharp and sympathetic observers of human frailties. In the stories they developed, both often threw credibility to the winds in the pursuit of the suspense that was their major goal. Hitchcock, who had exhaustive story conferences on all of his films, knew very well that the plot of *North by Northwest* (1959) made no sense. But he didn't care, deciding the audience wouldn't think about the inconsistencies while they were watching. Similarly, many of Woolrich's stories so grip the reader in the telling that giant holes in the plot go unnoticed until the story is laid aside. Of course, Woolrich felt the need to provide, or believed his markets required, a logical explanation. But it wasn't logic that inspired him. So while he made more effort to explain things than Hitchcock ever did—compare "It Had to Be Murder" with *Rear Window*, for example—his explanations were

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often perfunctory and seldom watertight, his surprise endings more tacked on than organic.

The writer and the director both had more than their share of personal demons and kinks, although Woolrich's were so bad they made Hitchcock's look wholesomely normal. Seeing a performance of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* at age eight precipitated a lifelong obsession with death and the dark pessimism embodied in the subtitle of Francis M. Nevins's 1988 biography, *Cornell Woolrich: First You Dream, Then You Die*. He apparently never achieved a satisfactory romantic relationship, and during his sham marriage he would don a sailor suit in the small hours and look for partners on the Los Angeles waterfront. After his mother's death in 1957, he spent his last years in alcoholic self-hatred, writing little and finishing less, attending publishing-world parties but deflecting personal contact, doing his best to antagonize his few friends, and ignoring his diabetic condition to the extent that a gangrenous leg had to be amputated. Though he didn't need the money, in years of low output he sometimes dusted off old stories and presented them as new work. When he died in 1968, his funeral was sparsely attended, and his considerable estate went to Columbia University to fund a creative writing scholarship.

In honor of the Woolrich centenary, Francis Nevins has edited *Night and Fear*, a new gathering of previously uncollected stories. Most of the fourteen stories are from pulp magazines, dates ranging from 1936 to 1943, with a single late entry published in 1970, two years after Woolrich's death and long after his period of peak productivity. All are highly readable, typically inventive, with the usual flaws overshadowed by the emotional impact and mastery of reader manipulation. Nevins's introduction provides a concise summary of Woolrich's life and career.

Woolrich's technique is often characterized as a normal-day-gone-wrong. A Woolrich story is a fantasy played out by recognizable humans in a solidly realistic background (usually Manhattan) with specific details (the costs of things, popular song lyrics, advertising slogans, fashion observations) that define the time and place and enhance the reader's willingness to accept incredible events. The people are ordinary, and they think they can control their destinies, but even happy outcomes are determined by tricks of arbitrary fate. Most of the stories in *Night and Fear* have nominally upbeat endings, but the overall message is the random unfairness of life. In Woolrich's fiction, the reader can never be sure if things will work out well for the protagonist, a different person in every story. Apart from such romantic suspense writers as Phyllis A. Whitney and Daphne du Maurier, Woolrich may be the only major figure in mystery fiction never to employ a continuing character.

The ups and downs of Woolrich's reputation have been great, but his place as a significant crime writer now seems secure.

Consider the nightmare situations Woolrich concocts for his protagonists. In "Cigarette," a mobster's errand runner must retrieve a poisoned cigarette before it kills the wrong person. In "Double Feature," a cop at the movies with his girlfriend spots a notorious fugitive (clearly inspired by Dillinger) two seats down. In "The Heavy Sugar," a down-and-outer finds a stolen diamond necklace in a diner's sugar bowl and has reason to fear both sides of the law. In "Death in the Yoshiwara," a sailor in pre-World War II Japan tries to save a young American woman accused of murdering her fiancé.

Woolrich is not usually thought of as a writer of police procedurals—indeed, his name doesn't even appear in the index of Leroy Lad Panek's recent history, *The American Police Novel*—but he frequently wrote about cops and usually viewed them with respect and sympathy (unlike Hitchcock, who feared them). His stories may feature good cops or bad cops—the fine story "Detective William Brown" offers both—but they exist in a society that tacitly accepts the third degree and other police practices that today would be considered dubious. In "Endicott's Girl," Woolrich's favorite of all his short stories, a cop who comes to suspect his eighteen-year-old daughter of murder goes far beyond ethical borders to cover up her involvement—and is allowed to get away with it. By the way he stacks the cards, Woolrich is able to make readers sympathize with brutal police methods that in real life would appall them.

At least twenty-five Woolrich collections have preceded *Night and Fear*, so it would be unrealistic to expect the new book to show the author at his very best, but the selections are certainly representative of his unique talent and are a suitable introduction to his work.

The ups and downs of Woolrich's reputation have been even greater than the literary norm. After peaking in the 1940s with a steady flow of novels, story collections, and movie and radio adaptations, both his production and his stature gradually declined in the 1950s. Between 1955 and 1968, the Mystery Writers of America gave their first nine Grand Master awards, but none to Woolrich, though he was a natural candidate. The early 1980s saw a resurgence of interest, with a spate of new collections and a paperback reprint series. Through the 1990s, his stock waned somewhat, but the inclusion of his last major novel, *I Married a Dead Man* (1948), in the Library of America's 1997 *Crime Novels: American Noir* volumes, alongside the work of James M. Cain, Jim Thompson, Patricia Highsmith, and Chester Himes, restored him yet again.

Woolrich's place as a significant American writer of crime fiction now seems secure, if not on the Hammett or Chandler level, certainly in the top dozen. ♦

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Evangelizing China

David Aikman explores the rise of Christianity in the People's Republic. BY TODD M. JOHNSON

The title *Jesus in Beijing* seriously understates the comprehensive history of Christianity in China, leading up to the religion's current vitality. No other popular book covers Chinese Christianity like *Jesus in Beijing*—which views China's surprising conversions through the eyes of Nestorians, Jesuits, Protestants, house churches, modern Catholics, cults, students, farmers, artists, government officials, and others. The strength of the book is this mind-boggling breadth of Aikman's purview.

Jesus in Beijing
How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power
by David Aikman
Regnery, 344 pp., $27.95

A former Beijing bureau chief for *Time* magazine, Aikman also gives at least anecdotal evidence to believe that the number of Christians in China is now approaching a hundred million. Many China watchers are skeptical, but Aikman insists they miss the significance of the growth that house church networks are producing.

Along the way, Aikman highlights the significant commitment of Chinese Christians to evangelize outside of China, especially along the Silk Road. The so-called "Back to Jerusalem" movement, with roots in the early twentieth century, has become the hallmark of Chinese mission strategy. Chinese Christians are particularly interested in engaging Muslims with the gospel and view their non-Western background as giving them a distinct advantage over American and European Christians. Apparently, the movement is already sending Chinese missionaries outside of China and has embraced the goal of sending out a hundred thousand missionaries in the coming years.

Some early reviewers have expressed concern about how much Aikman has revealed about churches and missions in China, particularly some of their innovative and unorthodox methods—which, given the regime's hostility, is a real danger. But much of the material Aikman uses is already in print. What *Jesus in Beijing* does is weave that material in with the author's interviews of key players in the story. His contribution is first in his story-telling ability and second in his interpretation of what the growth of Christianity means for the future of China.

It is here that one might express certain reservations. Aikman seems to see a Christian trajectory that has particular political overtones, such as a Christian worldview leading to supporting war as a primary means of fighting terrorism. This tends to downplay other Christian views in play in China. What would happen if Chinese Christians were gradually discipled into an Anabaptist view of peace?

Aikman predicts that China will be between 20 and 30 percent Christian within thirty years, by taking the growth rate of Christians from 1949 to 2000 and projecting it forward. But the Christian growth rate in the twentieth century was approximately three times faster than overall population growth—which will be difficult to maintain. Mathematically speaking, large movements tend to slow over time, since hundreds multiply much faster than millions. Nonetheless, even more moderate projections see Christians making up well over 10 percent of China's population in the coming decades. That raises the question of how other religious and nonreligious movements will respond, from neo-Confucianism to Buddhism to Chinese folk-religion to Islam to atheism. In every case, there is the possibility of resurgence and the corresponding impact on Chinese government and society. The history of China is full of surprising religious and cultural turns.

Aikman's thesis is not diminished by any of these caveats. The Chinese government will do well to recognize sooner rather than later the enormously positive contribution that Chinese Christianity can make to China's role in the global milieu. Indeed, it is past time for Westerners in general to pay attention to the growth of Christianity outside Europe and North America. *Jesus in Beijing* is a well-documented and engaging start. ♦

Owen Franken / CORBIS

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Defending Modern Times

Jeffrey Stout takes on the critics of liberal democracy.

BY THOMAS HIBBS

George Orwell once quipped that T.S. Eliot had managed the unlikely feat of making modern life seem worse than it actually is. In *Democracy and Tradition*, Jeffrey Stout attributes something similar to a pair of contemporary academics, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and the theologian Stanley Hauerwas—both known for their unflinching criticisms of modern liberalism and their advocacy of virtue in local communities.

Democracy and Tradition
by Jeffrey Stout
Princeton, 400 pp., $35

The argument is interesting. One knew MacIntyre and Hauerwas were influential, but who suspected that they made the republic tremble? In *Democracy and Tradition*, Stout makes some reasonable criticisms of what he labels the "new traditionalism." But his alternative account of the public philosophy of American democracy—his attempt to articulate a high liberal "ethical inheritance" that might stand up against the dangerous assaults of MacIntyre and Hauerwas—is surprisingly thin. And what he does say ends up in some measure confirming the worst suspicions of the radical critics of modern liberalism.

The chief point of dispute is whether the recovery of virtue requires a commitment to a conception of tradition that is antithetical to democracy. Stout thinks the answer to that question depends on one's conception of virtue. Democracy in itself is not opposed to tradition or virtue, according to Stout, but only to certain forms of tradition and virtue. Instead of a return to premodern models, of the sort promoted by MacIntyre and Hauerwas, Stout pushes for conceptions of tradition and virtue compatible with our democratic commitment to "the freedom to decide important matters for ourselves."

Stout wants, in other words, to carve out a position between the advocates of premodern tradition and those who think that modern liberalism is to be celebrated precisely because it destroys all traditions and privatizes every good. Indeed, Stout lays part of the blame for the radicalism of MacIntyre and Hauerwas on the most popular defenders of modern liberalism. "The more Rawlsian our law schools and ethics centers become," Stout contends, "the more radically Hauerwasian our theology schools become." John Rawls may have hoped that works like his *Theory of Justice* would bring consensus, but they have instead produced an increasingly acrimonious divide between a complacent liberalism and a reactionary anti-liberalism.

Thus, when Stout suggests that we need narratives that aid us in finding our place in the current cultural landscape, narratives that do not paper over injustices and irrationalities in cultural and political life, he would certainly find support in MacIntyre and Hauerwas. When he argues that we need to consider the grounds for anger and despair, on the one hand, and for hope, on the other, he would again find agreement.

Stout's disagreement becomes pointed only when we consider that, for MacIntyre and Hauerwas, the liberalism of the modern nation-state—with its bureaucratic individualism, its instrumentalist rationality, and its utilitarian economics—does not provide a way to do any of this. Both see the modern nation-state as the great enemy, although they do so for slightly different reasons. Insisting that "the true history of the world . . . is not carried by the nation-state," Hauerwas, America's best-known pacifist theologian, worries that Christians court idolatry when they identify among their primary responsibilities the support of the secular state.

Meanwhile, the philosopher MacIntyre argues that "the modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services . . . and, on the other, as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf." It is, he said, "like being asked to die for the telephone company."

Stout rightly, if predictably, observes that these accounts of modernity are distortions, even straw men, designed to set up local communities of virtue as the only refuge from the corrosive forces of liberalism. The more interesting criticism in *Democracy and Tradition* is that this crude way of depicting modernity puts each thinker at odds with his own thought. MacIntyre has had much to say about the nature of rationality and reasonable debate; he insists that the best test of a position involves subjecting it to the best arguments from rival views, and this in turn requires that one possess a kind of imaginative sympathy with the position of one's interlocutor.

Yet, MacIntyre's hasty dismissal of the modern nation-state fails to examine liberalism in its complexity. Similarly, Hauerwas sometimes willfully refuses to engage certain kinds of questions. In response to the question, "Do I support democracy?" he states, "I have to confess that I have not got the

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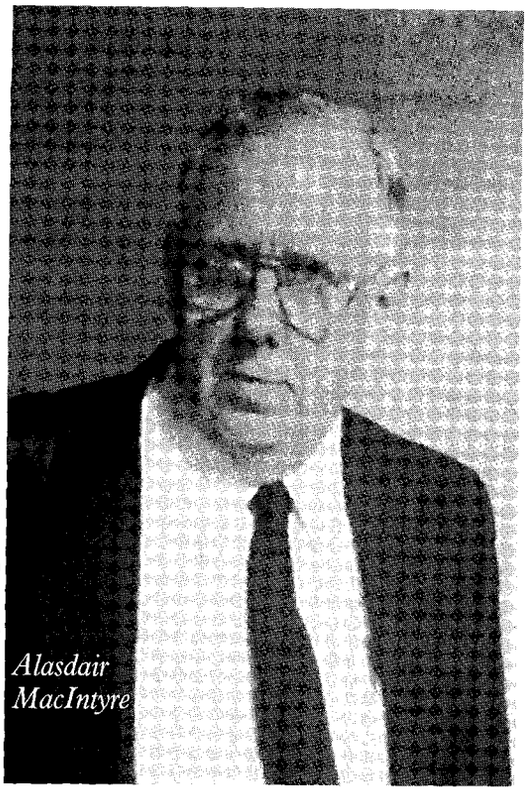
Alasdair MacIntyre

Photographical Library of Living Philosophers

slightest idea, since I do not know what it means to call this society 'democratic.' Indeed, one of the troubling aspects about such a question is the assumption that how Christians answer it might matter."

Stout wants to press this point further and insist, on the basis of Hegel's account of social rationality, that modernity itself provides at least part of the social substratum that makes even our criticisms of modernity possible. Against MacIntyre and Hauerwas, Stout urges that believers in local communities of virtue should be able to "identify with their community even as they express their alienation from it." They should "maintain their convictions while taking up their responsibility as citizens."

Building upon this, he concludes that MacIntyre and Hauerwas "actively foster alienation from public discussion"—despite the fact that they have a much greater appetite for public argument than most of their liberal critics. *Democracy and Tradition* does admit the importance of recovering the language and practice of virtue, but only through such distinctively American authors as Emerson and Dewey.

For Stout, this need not entail radical individualism. His vision of the "pluralism of modern democratic society" involves the "co-existence of multiple subcultures." But it is not at all clear how we are to understand the relation of local subcultures to the whole of American society, or what will keep the diversity from becoming a homogeneity.

Despite chapters on "The Emergence of Modern Democratic Culture" and "The Ideal of a Common Morality," Stout does not have much to say about the content of our public philosophy or about the constitutional, legal, and pedagogical structures needed to preserve our ethical inheritance. *Democracy and Tradition* is disappointingly slim on key questions concerning how and where virtue is to be cultivated and how it is to be defended against the many modern threats MacIntyre and Hauerwas so carefully enumerate.

In the end, Stout proffers an Emersonian vision of democratic excellence, but some of what he says on this score plays directly into the hands of his opponents. He rules out as irrational and psychologically debilitating certain conceptions of religious life. He takes aim at a doctrine central to traditional Christian theology, original sin, which he describes as a "blight." He explains, "Masochistic self-abasement is not a virtue at all by Emersonian lights, even when it goes misleadingly by the name of piety."

But for whom has masochistic self-abasement ever been a virtue? There is a long and decidedly premodern tradition of distinguishing true from false piety, humility from scrupulosity, and obedience from self-degradation. For that matter, if Stout wants to articulate the "ethical inheritance" of America, it is difficult to see how he can discard original sin, some version of which was affirmed not only by the Puritans who formed so much of American thought, but also by the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. Not so overtly as Rawls but nonetheless palpably, Stout wants to refashion Christianity to suit a certain strain of liberalism.

Jeffrey Stout is surely right that there is more to be said on behalf of modernity than MacIntyre and Hauerwas allow. Unfortunately, in *Democracy and Tradition*, he never gets around to saying it. Modern liberalism needs to be rescued from the radical individualists if it is to be philosophically defended from its critics. But Stout's attempt to construct a middle ground crumbles at the least touch back into the same old implacable divide—between the Panglossians who insist that liberalism's dissolution of tradition and virtue is exactly what makes modernity so wonderful, and the doomsayers who reply that liberalism's dissolution of tradition and virtue is exactly what makes modernity so despicable. ♦

Stanley Hauerwas

Institute on Religion and Public Life

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A Writer's Life

A new biography reminds us how good John Gardner's novels were. **BY JOHN WILSON**

Twenty-odd years after John Gardner's death we have the first full biography—Barry Silesky's *John Gardner: Literary Outlaw*—and not a moment too soon. Visit Amazon and you'll find that many of Gardner's books are "out of stock" and effectively out of print. If younger readers recognize his name at all, it's likely to be as the author of two widely circulated handbooks for aspiring novelists.

John Gardner
Literary Outlaw
by Barry Silesky
Algonquin, 358 pp., $24.95

Gardner is too good to be forgotten without a fight. Born in Batavia, New York, in 1933, he was a farm boy who went away to college. Although he wrote furiously through his twenties, his first novel, *The Resurrection*, didn't appear until 1966, and then to little notice. His second novel, *The Wreckage of Agathon*, received some fine reviews but nothing more when it was published in 1970. Only in 1971 with *Grendel*—an inspired retelling of *Beowulf* from the point of view of the monster—was he finally established, at close to forty, as a writer to reckon with.

The voice of Grendel, telling his own story, is a narrative invention as distinctive as Melville's Ishmael, Bellow's Augie March, or Ellison's Invisible Man. Now crude, now tender, ridiculous and poignant, the voice of the monster is the human writ large, caricatured with witty incongruity: this selfish bag of bones with a soul and an insatiable yearning for the true, the beautiful, the divine. Parodying the conventions of the Old English poetry he loved (his Grendel is mad for alliteration), shifting registers effortlessly from high archaic to anachronistic modern vernacular, Gardner works the antinomies that define humanity even into the texture of his sentences. And if the reader notices that the dragon which Grendel visits sounds suspiciously like Jean-Paul Sartre, so much the better.

For the next decade, until his death in 1982, Gardner was ubiquitous. He followed the critical success of *Grendel* with three widely praised and bestselling novels: *The Sunlight Dialogues* in 1972, *Nickel Mountain* in 1973, and *October Light* in 1976. A dazzling collection of short fiction, *The King's Indian*, had appeared in 1974, not to mention the book-length poem *Jason and Medeia*, several children's books, libretti for operas, and a shelf of translations and literary criticism of works in Old and Middle English.

While enjoying a triumphant run such as few writers ever achieve, Gardner was hardly solitary and inaccessible. His long, prematurely white hair and always-present pipe made him immediately recognizable. A new interview with him seemed to appear every week: rapid-fire literary talk, by turns passionate and sly, often outrageous, not infrequently contradicting in some particulars the interview he had given the week before. It was clear at a glance why students flocked to his classes.

Yet having reached this summit of literary celebrity, Gardner took a mighty fall. In April 1978, not long after he underwent surgery for colon cancer, he published *On Moral Fiction*, an important but deeply flawed book in which he took self-serving swipes at many of his contemporaries and generally muddied the waters even as he rightly decried the fashionably glib nihilism of so much contemporary fiction. That same month, Peter Prescott in *Newsweek* accused Gardner of excessive and unacknowledged borrowing from other scholars in his biography of Chaucer, published the year before. A year or so earlier, Gardner had left his first wife, Joan, after years of bitter wrangling, and was living intermittently with one of his students, Liz Rosenberg (whom he married in 1980 when his divorce became final). As he learned early in 1979, he owed the IRS several hundred thousand dollars in unpaid taxes. This was the author of *On Moral Fiction*—a jeremiad which, to top it off, laid down aesthetic laws that his own fiction flagrantly violated.

The resulting controversy dominated the response to Gardner's remaining fiction, and to some extent has continued to shape perceptions of his work. A cluster of critical studies, including a couple that are quite good, appeared in the decade after his death, but since then there has been very little.

The time is right for Barry Silesky's new biography, which should draw attention back to Gardner's own fiction. Silesky's book was preceded several years ago by *On Broken Glass: Loving and Losing John Gardner*, a valuable memoir by Susan Thornton, the woman Gardner was about to marry when he lost control of his motorcycle on a gentle curve near his home in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. Taken together, they give a much fuller picture of Gardner than has previously been available.

Silesky is an honorable biographer—and if that seems like damning with faint praise, you haven't read many biographies lately. He is humane, honest but never prurient, candid about Gardner's flaws yet not assuming superiority to his subject. As a writer, alas, Silesky is mediocre, and he hasn't been helped by his editors. It has been a while since I encountered a book so carelessly edited, full of howlers, solecisms, clumsy repetition, and other signs of negligence.

John Wilson is the editor of Books & Culture.

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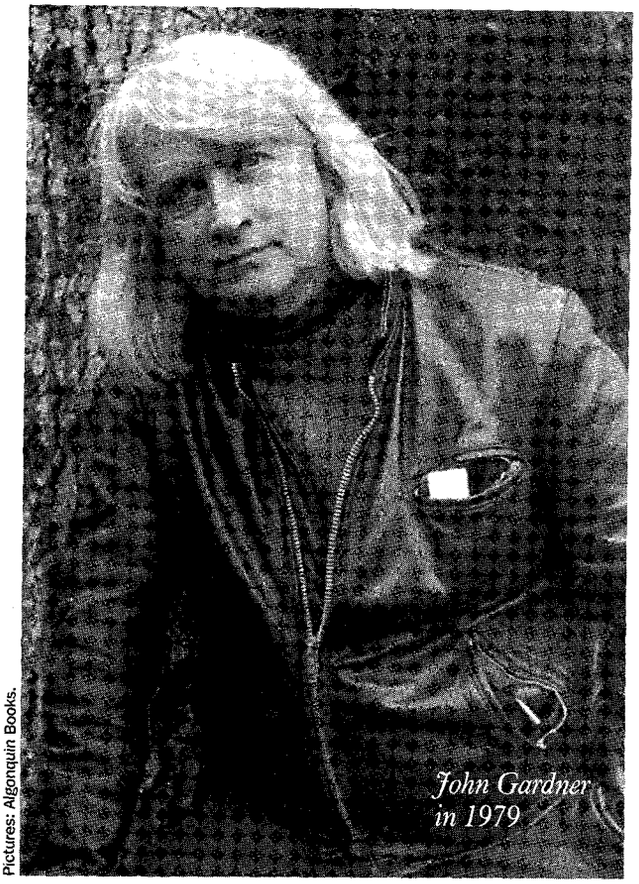

John Gardner in 1979

Pictures: Algonquin Books.

Silesky frames his account of Gardner's life with two accidents. The first took place in April 1945 on the family farm in western New York, when eleven-year-old Gardner ran over his six-year-old brother, Gilbert, who had been riding on the bar between the tractor Gardner was driving and the cultipacker he was pulling, a 1,500-pound double roller that crushed the younger boy. (A lightly fictionalized account of the event appears in the story "Redemption," from the 1981 collection, *The Art of Living.*) The September 1982 motorcycle accident that concludes Silesky's narrative ended Gardner's life.

How much the life Gardner lived between those accidents was shaped by that April day will remain a matter of speculation. What's beyond debate is the character of that life. Gardner was driven and ferociously ambitious, but his ambitions were for his art as much as for himself. He was often close to intolerable, with his infidelities, his drunkenness, his arrogance—and yet he was an exhilarating talker, an inspiring and generous teacher, and an inexhaustible impresario. He had a gift for encouraging talent, becoming one of the first editors to publish Joyce Carol Oates, and he was Raymond Carver's most influential teacher.

He was also, as his friend the poet Dave Smith recalled, a compulsive liar and a world-class put-on artist—yet with a sweetness, too, that is caught in some photos of the early 1970s, before he put on the mask of the clown. Beneath all his acts was a purity of intention that doesn't excuse his self-indulgence but that justifies Silesky's labor and makes Gardner's books worth seeking out: not only those the critics loved when he was riding high (*October Light*, in fact, hasn't aged well) but also those that were savaged when he became public enemy number one on literary hit lists. *Freddy's Book* is greatly undervalued, and *Mickelsson's Ghosts*, published the year he died, is a fitting capstone to his lifework.

Gardner's overriding theme was Milton's—to justify the ways of God to man. "I think he never got over being a Christian," Dave Smith said, "though he once told me when I asked him about this that he was the last worshipper of Zeus." "Blessed are the meek," proclaims the Dickensian hero of *The Sunlight Dialogues*, Fred Clumly, police chief of Batavia, after he has lost his job, "by which I mean all of us. . . . God be kind to all Good Samaritans and also bad ones. For such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

It's fashionable to bemoan the current divisiveness that rends the nation as "unprecedented," but I suspect Gardner would be amused by such hand-wringing. America in 1966, as depicted in *The Sunlight Dialogues*—when a long-haired, terribly scarred anarchist who calls himself the Sunlight Man writes the word "love" across two lanes of Oak Street and is thrown in jail—is no less divided than the country today. No less divided than Grendel's heart, for that matter. You want to take the pulse of America? Read John Gardner. ♦

Gardner with his motorcycle in 1982

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The Standard Reader

"Get thee behind me, Satan!"

Books in Brief

Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History, 1585-1828 **by Walter A. McDougall (HarperCollins, 656 pp., $29.95).** The Pulitzer Prize-winning Walter A. McDougall has produced the first volume of a trilogy that promises to be the finest history of America in print. Reading it, one is struck by the inadequacy of previous narratives. McDougall portrays the United States as being neither conceived in Original Sin nor entirely sinless. He pays tribute to the genius of the Founding Fathers and the virtues of the revolutionary generation, but also judiciously tackles the roles of women, American Indians, blacks, the lower classes, and immigrants. In a remarkable, and wholly welcome, break with established academic norms, McDougall even cracks some jokes along the way.

In setting out to explain "who and why we are what we are," McDougall hits on an intriguing theme. We are, it seems, the world's most adept "hustlers"—in both senses. American English possesses 175 verbs meaning "to swindle," but our freedom to hustle makes us "builders, doers, go-getters, dreamers, hard workers, organizers, engineers, and a people supremely generous." We have enjoyed an unparalleled liberty to pursue our ambitions by laudable means, but the existence of human imperfection inevitably exerts a corrupting influence. The next installments of McDougall's history should garner him more Pulitzers.

—Alexander Rose

Public Policy and Social Issues: Jewish Sources and Perspectives **by Marshall J. Breger (Praeger, 296 pp., $49.95).** American Jews maintain a deep commitment to compassionate social policies, believing their religious tradition obliges them to care for the disadvantaged. Unfortunately, however, many American Jews have identified liberal government social programs as the sole appropriate expression of their religious tradition. Their continuing embrace of the welfare state, for example, departs from centuries of tradition that understood the moral importance of community.

In fact, Marshall Breger argues in *Public Policy and Social Issues*, the religious principles underlying the traditional Jewish approach to public policy are inherently conservative. Consequently, "a distinctly Jewish public policy is going to seem very different from what is generally thought of as American Jewish politics." Engaging and provocative, Breger's essays apply Jewish teachings to some of the most debated issues in America, from abortion and welfare programs to genetic engineering and the environment. More than any other single volume, *Public Policy and Social Issues* dispels the notion that there is only a liberal "Jewish view."

—David Dalin

With All Our Strength: The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan **by Anne E. Brodsky (Routledge, 318 pp., $25).** In the realm of inspiring stories, the decades-long struggle of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) must surely rank high. Founded in 1977 by a college student named Meena (who was assassinated in 1987), RAWA has sustained an underground resistance against the Soviets, the warlords, and the jihadis. Tracing the history of the association, Anne Brodsky's book shows the activities of RAWA's members, from secretly recording the execution of a woman by the Taliban (it ended up in the BBC documentary *Beneath the Veil*) to running schools in the post-Taliban era.

Brodsky sports impeccable left-wing credentials: Besides being a Women's Studies professor, she's contributed to the Chicago-based "progressive" magazine *In These Times* (which entitled one of her dispatches, far more pessimistically than it warranted, "Hollow Victory"). But she does her best to avoid injecting her own view into her subjects' stories; "I did not want to write a book about a European American woman's experience with Afghan women in Pakistan and Afghanistan," she notes in the introduction.

She mostly succeeds, so don't be put off by the blurbs on the cover from polemicists like Katha Pollitt and Arundhati Roy. *With All Our Strength* is a worthwhile history of women whose fight for good transcends ideology.

—John Tabin

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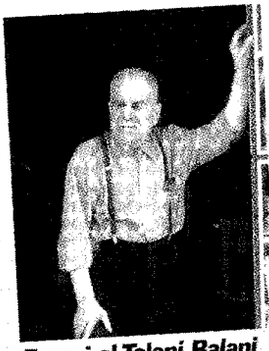
IRAQI ELECTIONS

Iraq the Vote: Leading Candidates

HASANI FASANI AL-TALANI BALANI
Political affiliation: **Kurdistan Islamic Front**
Balani has been active for decades in Kurdish causes. He counsels moderation in dealing with Arabs living in Kurdish areas, saying that "driving them out at gunpoint would not please Allah." Instead, he advocates "non-violent measures such as social ostracism and discriminatory taxes." A self-described progressive on women's rights, Balani rejects honor killings in favor of "more creative solutions, like beatings."


REUTERS—NO, IT RHYMES WITH "GOITERS"
Fasani al-Talani Balani

MARWAN ALI AL-NAQ AL-NAD BARGHUM
Political affiliation: **Sunni Warriors Party**
Barghum discounts rumors that link him to the former Baath Party. He is best known for his recently published biography of Uday Hussein called "The Gentle Coach," which he hopes will act as a corrective to "prevailing caricatures" of Saddam Hussein's late son. "It grieved Uday to punish underlings," says Barghum. "And people forget his marvelous smile." Barghum says he offers his "hand of brotherhood to the American pigs" but recommends a U.S. policy of "withdrawal in three to four days." Factional disputes will not be a problem, he says, adding, "Have no fears. We'll deal with the Shiites."

CORBIS / WHAT DOES BILL GATES NOT OWN?
Al-Naq al-Nad Barghum

TARIQ TALAL BIN-LAL KABAL
Political affiliation: **Thousand Shrieking Martyrs Party**
Kabal commands a sizable group of Shiite followers who can be identified by the photographs of Kabal stapled to their foreheads. Kabal, who spent twenty years in Iran, has penned numerous works on the Koran, including *Faith Through Death* (1998), *Death Through Faith* (1999), *Deadly Faithful Fighting* (2000) and *Fighting Faithfully to Death* (2001). Kabal says that Iranian-style theocracy is not the answer and that he has better things in mind, although he prefers not to be specific. "Just hold an election," Kabal says. "You'll see."

CYGNA, SIGNA, SCHMIGNA—WHATEVER
Bin-Lal Kabal

AHMED TUL-BAM TAL-BUM BARAM
Political affiliation: **The People's Collective Communist Party of Iraq**
Baram has been a force for unity in Iraq, urging Sunnis, Shias, Arabs and Kurds to put aside ethnicity, gender and religion in order to focus on class conflict and liquidating the bourgeoisie. Baram promises that once the counterrevolutionaries are suppressed, it will be "child's play" to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat. "Once we have smashed the exploiting classes," Baram says, "Iraq will become a workers' paradise." He adds, "All we need now are some factories."

AH, SOFT HANDS! YOU RUB MY LEG, EH?
Tul-Bam Tal-Bum Baram

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Why Must Colle[illegible]stly?

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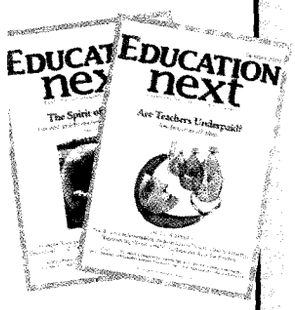

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In 1988, I wrote that "cons[illegible] no frills university' to turn the higher-education marketplace upside down." I lamented that "the $80,000 bachelor's degree is upon us, and the $100,000 edition cannot be far away."

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In 1987, touring colleges with my kids, I was shaken by two realities: first, the absence of any sort of productivity gains in higher education, amid an economy whose principal engine of growth was (and remains) improved output per unit of worker input; second, the tendency of U.S. colleges to compete for desirable students by adding upscale amenities, what a Mount Holyoke dean once termed the "Chivas Regal strategy." (During our campus visits, my daughter remarked that it was like comparing resort hotels.)

My own children are—fortunately—finished with all that, but the idea of creating some stripped-down, no-frills college models seems even more apt today. What would such places look like? Key features would include a lean administration, few nonteaching employees, and most campus jobs performed by students or outsourced; amenities (entertainment, food courts, fancy gyms, etc.) left to entrepreneurs—and paid for by those who use them; a year-round calendar with facilities in constant use, steady work for employees, and the opportunity for energetic students to finish faster; faculty that are paid well but worked hard; a trimmed-down curriculum with a solid core and strong majors in a dozen fields but no pretense of teaching everything; and rigorous exit standards with diplomas equivalent to an intellectual "warranty." This model could serve as a plausible formula for containing the cost and [illegible] of higher education and eking some productivity gains from this enterprise.

What's happened since 1988, however, seems noteworthy on four fronts.

First, yesterday's troubling trends have intensified. Students take ever longer to complete their degrees. The academic week and year grow ever shorter as amenities grow yet more lavish (indoor climbing walls?).

Second, whereas the price pain then was felt primarily by those at private campuses, today the public university price tag is soaring, too.

Third, higher education has developed a fast-growing sector that follows the no-frills formula: the for-profit sector, characterized by the University of Phoenix and kindred vendors of reasonably efficient and relatively inexpensive postsecondary schooling.

Fourth, technology enables students to avail themselves of higher education without ever showing up on campus. The for-profit sector makes expert use of this delivery system, but traditional universities are working at it, too. Because distance learning makes it possible not only to slash campus expenses but also to extend a professor's "reach" to far more students, it serves willy-nilly to boost academic productivity.

As Congress and state legislatures seek to contain the cost of college, they may want to encourage more no-frills institutions and nudge more students toward the efficient providers. The starting point is to cease treating traditional college economics as immutable and instead to recognize that society has an obligation to reward efficiency and productivity here just like it does everyplace else.

—Chester E. Finn Jr.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution; chairman of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

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